Titan Arum

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Titan Arum

by ProxyOne

Summary

Will is a botanist, working in the greenhouse of the local Botanical Gardens. He is getting his life back on track after his divorce, but he can't help but notice someone who keeps coming back to his greenhouse to draw, day after day. A man who seems to have been paying very close attention to him...

Notes

So I don't normally write AUs, but I had a pressing need to write this one. I've got it all planned out, but we'll see how it goes :P

Chapter 1

It was on days like today – cold, snowy, the wind feeling like it was blowing ice crystals directly through your skin – that Will Graham was thankful for his job at the Botanical Gardens. The heat could be cloying, muggy, but when the choice was between being inside, surrounded by the steamy warmth and lush greenness around him, or out in weather that had a real possibility of freezing him to death before he reached his car, then his decision was no decision at all.

He was having a break, chatting in the lunch room with Beverly, the other resident botanist in the gardens. He liked Beverly. She was brash, and confident, and everything Will wasn't. It was nice having someone like that to play off, and he couldn't help but feel himself growing more confident himself as he'd gotten to know her. It seemed to be a side effect of being around her so much, which was odd, given that he'd decided on the day that they had met that he could never like her. And yet, here they were, as close to best friends as it was possible to get.

“I really think our corpse flower is going to bloom this year,” she was saying from behind the mug of steaming tea pressed to her lips.

“What makes you so sure?” Will asked. It hadn't bloomed in the entire time he had worked at the Gardens, but he had heard all about the last time it had. Specifically the smell it was famous for, but that didn't put him off at all.

“Just a feeling. But I was right the last time it bloomed. That was before you were here, right?”

“Yeah, I think I started the year after. I heard all about it, though.”

“It was great! Stunk like you wouldn't believe, but it was beautiful to see, in its own way.”

Will just smiled. In truth, he was very excited to see it, but he wasn't sure Beverly was right. If you'd told Will Graham as a kid that he'd be getting quietly excited about seeing a flower bloom, he probably would have kicked you in the shins. And yet, here he was, doing just that. His path had taken quite a different turn than he had expected, but to his own surprise he found himself quite content with his life. He seemed to be the only one though.

“So, Graham. When are you finally going to get over Molly and get out there again?” Bev asked, glancing at him slyly.

“I'm not really interested, Bev. I told you that already. I'm enjoying my time alone for now.”

“Are you sure? I thought you were really into Alana Bloom for a while there.”

Doctor Alana Bloom had been Will's mentor while studying for his botany degree, and the two had remained friendly since he had taken the job here. And Beverly was frustratingly

accurate. Will *had* developed more than just a crush on Alana, but he knew it would never go anywhere.

“I might have been, but that was before she met Margot.”

“No way, Alana met someone? She kept that one quiet. Go Alana!”

“It's a recent thing, so don't go running to her telling her I told you. She doesn't need to think I'm a gossip, as well as -”

Will stopped, not wanting to let Beverly know what Alana had said to him when he had finally worked up the courage to proposition her.

“As well as what, Will?”

“Nothing, forget it. So this corpse flower, huh? How often does it tend to bloom, anyway?

Beverly narrowed her eyes at Will's obvious subject change, but decided not to mention anything, for which Will was exceedingly grateful.

“It's only had two blooms, but there were six years between them.”

They lapsed into silence, Will idly picking at his sandwich while Bev finished her tea.

“That guy keeps coming back,” he said, as much to break the suddenly awkward silence between them as anything. Bev perked back up again. If there was one subject she liked more than Will's woeful lack of any sort of love life – or social life at all, for that matter – it was *the guy.*

“The weird one? What's he been doing?” she asked excitedly.

“The same as always. He just sits, and draws. I swear he must have drawn every leaf of every plant in this place, but he just keeps on doing it. Every week he's here at least once. But this week he's been here every day. It's kinda creepy,” he said, giving a theatrical shudder as he finished.

“It's weird that he never goes into any of the other greenhouses, don't you think?” Bev mused, gazing into the distance in thought. “He only ever goes to your one. You're the only one who even sees him, did you know that?”

Will raised his eyebrows in faint surprise. Surely *someone* else must have seen him.

“I assure you, he's definitely there. In fact, he hasn't turned up today. I bet he'll be there this afternoon. He might already be there now.”

“I should come and see this mystery plant stalker you've attracted. Let's go and look!”

Beverly bounced out of her chair, quickly swilling down the last dregs of her tea.

“Bev, we are not going to go and stare at someone just because you think he's weird.”

“Hey, I'm not the one who described him as weird. That's all on you.”

Will sighed in exasperation.

“He's probably not even there yet.”

“Then it doesn't matter if I come and harass you in your garden, does it?”

Will gave up. Once Bev got it into her head to do something, there was generally very little he could do to dissuade her.

“*Fine.* But if he is there you are not to say a word, okay?”

“Okay, I won't do anything to embarrass you, Will,” Bev said before blowing him a kiss.

“Why do I talk to you,” Will muttered with a scowl.

“Because you love me, and you know I'm a better judge of who's creepy and who's not.”

Will huffed, shoving the remains of his lunch into his mouth before getting up and following Bev out of the lunch room. It wasn't far to the entrance of the the greenhouse Will was in charge of, but it was *cold*, and so they hurried out across the courtyard, and towards the imposing entrance of the structure. It was by far the biggest building on the grounds, filled with thousands of plants, which was why it was the only one that Will looked after, helped out by a willing (and sometimes not so willing) bevy of enthusiastic students looking for experience.

They both sighed as they opened the door and felt the wave of humid air flow out onto them as they stepped beneath the ostentatious sign proclaiming this to be the Lecter Greenhouse, named for the family whose donations funded the gardens themselves, and by extension helped Will stay in the job. Will knew next to nothing about them other than they had begun donating fifty or so years ago, and had never set foot in the place due to them being based in Europe somewhere. Will for one was quite happy for that state of affairs to continue. He had no desire to meet anyone who could afford to pour the sort of money into this place that they were doing.

They shucked their jackets off, wandering the long way to the staffroom that housed all of the equipment needed.

“So where does he normally go?” Bev whispered.

“Anywhere. Everywhere. Sometimes he's up here, sometimes he follows the path down to the fernery. There's no real pattern to it.”

“Well that's inconsiderate of him, isn't it?” replied Beverly. “How are we supposed to stalk someone who doesn't follow a nice predictable pattern?”

“See, this is why I can't take you anywhere, Beverly.”

They walked on in companionable silence after that. The gardens were more or less deserted, only the most dedicated students coming in despite the cold, and no other visitors willing to venture outdoors just to see some flowers. So it was very easy to spot their phantom artist from a long way off, Will nudging Beverly's arm as he muttered, his voice pitched low.

“That's him.”

Beverly immediately straightened up, picking up her pace to reach the stranger more quickly. Will was torn between following her, or letting her go by herself. It didn't take him long to decide that he didn't trust her alone, and quickly caught up to her to make sure she didn't try to stop and chat with the man. They slowed back down as they approached, Bev nonchalantly pointing out various shrubs and flowers around the man and making comments about what new varieties would go well with the collection. Will carefully kept quiet, only offering the occasional hum in agreement until they were well out of sight, then he grabbed Beverly's arm and all but dragged her towards the staffroom.

“Hey, let me go!” she protested, batting his hand away. They entered the staffroom, Will closing the door then hanging his jacket on the hook.

“What were you doing?” he hissed. “You were so obvious!”

“Oh I was not,” Beverly laughed. “Seriously, that's what you've got all pissy about? Did you see how engrossed he was in his drawing? Which, by the way, was really good. Why didn't you tell me he was an actual artist and not just someone drawing leaves, like we usually get?”

“I've never looked at what he's drawing. Why would I look at that?”

“You don't get curious? Not even a little bit?”

Will gave Beverly a look, but didn't answer.

“Anyway, he's cute! I can see why he caught your attention.”

“Cute?” Will spluttered. “He's not cute! He's weird. And creepy. And angular. And *not* cute.”

“Those are some mighty sharp cheekbones, I'll give him that. Are you *sure* you haven't looked at what he was drawing?” Beverly's voice changed, becoming serious for a moment.

“I'm sure, why?”

“I think you'd be interested, is all. I know I was. Anyway, I better get back to doing my own work. God knows what those students will be doing without me there to guide them.”

Will waved her off, suddenly interested in a way he never had been before in what this man was drawing. He watched as Beverly wandered off, curious despite himself and mentally cursing Bev for throwing his careful indifference about the man out the window.

After half an hour of delaying, he finally gave in to his curiosity. If Bev could manage to sneak a look at the man's sketch pad without him noticing, Will was fairly certain he could as well. He took the long way around, checking on the students as he did so, before looping

back around to where the man had been sitting. *Had*, being the operative word, for there was nothing but a bare bench where he had been. No, not bare. A sheet of paper lay in the middle, and Will couldn't help but head straight over to have a look. He picked it up, turning it over to see what the man had drawn and left behind.

As it turned, Will felt his stomach drop. There, in the centre of the page, surrounded by flowers and ferns, was the unmistakeable image of his own face, vines and leaves twining around his limbs.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> Thanks everyone who was so kind with the last chapter! I'm having a lot of fun writing this, so I hope you have fun reading it ♥

One month later

“Hey Will, guess what?”

Beverly all but *bounded* into the staff room, excitedly throwing her jacket to the table. Will looked up in mild interest, wondering what could have gotten her so riled up. He raised his eyebrows in question, chewing slowly on his lunch.

“You remember how last month I told you that I was sure our corpse flower was going to bloom this year? Well guess who was right,” she said, smugness oozing from her.

“Huh,” Will responded, trying and failing to build up the level of excitement that Beverly was clearly expecting from him.

“Huh? *Huh?* That's all you can manage for an event that has only happened twice in the last decade?”

“No, it's great, Bev,” he replied, swallowing around his sandwich. “I'm excited, I am.”

“But?”

“But nothing. It's fine.”

Beverly gave Will a look, and he knew he wasn't going to be able to get out of here without telling her. It didn't mean he wasn't going to at least attempt a bit of fight, though.

“You're going to make me drag it out of you, aren't you?”

“That all depends on whether you think there's something to drag out of me at all.”

“Is it about your mystery artist boyfriend?” Bev asked, eyes twinkling as she cut through each and every one of Will's defenses with a single sentence. He sighed, unsurprised that she'd been able to read him so well. He hadn't exactly been hiding his feelings on the matter.

“He's not my boyfriend. I don't know his name, and all he does is draw plants.”

“And you.”

“That was one time!” Will said hotly

“So he hasn't drawn you since?” Bev asked, genuine curiosity showing itself in her expression.

“No. Or if he has, he hasn't left any of them behind again.”

“What'd you do with the last one? I would've like to have seen it again, up close this time.”

Will shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

“I don't know. Threw it out somewhere,” he lied, unwilling to let Bev know that he had taken it home. He still didn't know *why* he had kept it. It was creepy enough that there was this strange man drawing pictures of him in the first place. It seemed even weirder that he had kept it. He had it carefully tucked away in a drawer in his fly fishing desk, and he hadn't taken it out since he had put it there. But that didn't stop him from looking at the drawer most days, wondering *why*. Why to all of it.

He couldn't help but notice the skeptical look on Beverly's face, but chose to ignore it, instead taking a great – and feigned – interest in the snow out the window. Thankfully it was only a light dusting now, the worst of winter now well past them, but it was still *cold*. As he watched, he noticed a figure making its way towards the building, paper fluttering in the figure's hand. His stomach lurched a little, before he realised it was most decidedly *not* his stranger.

The door banged open, and Matthew Brown, their head horticulturalist, stomped his way into the room. He spared a glance for the two of them, eyes lingering a little longer on Will, as he made his way to the noticeboard to pin up the paper he had been carrying.

“Doctor du Maurier has decided there is to be a short notice fundraising event next week,” he said lazily, as he almost caressed the pins into the cork of the board. Beverly groaned, her head thumping down on top of her folded arms on the table.

“Please tell me this is something we don't need to be here for,” she said, and Will agreed with her sentiment wholeheartedly. He *hated* those things, surrounded by Baltimore's high society as they bid for various rare, and not so rare, plants. The ones provided by Will rarely went for much, societies elite tending to prefer the showy ostentation of orchids to the more subdued nature of his ferns, and the people themselves never failed to make him feel anything less than painfully uncomfortable. They were all so *fake,* and his job meant that he couldn't be anything other than unfailingly polite to any of them, no matter what inane tripe flowed from their mouths.

Doctor du Maurier herself – Bedelia, as she insisted that they call her – was in a league of her own. A psychiatrist by day, and the head of the board that oversaw the gardens themselves by night, she had a way of looking at Will like she knew more about him than she was letting on. Especially in the last couple of months. It was disconcerting, to say the least.

“That's a no, Katz,” Matthew said, interrupting Will's growing dread, only to expand on it further. “And just to make everyone feel even better, for the first time ever we'll be having a

visit from one of the Lecter family. Let me know if you need any help getting your house under control, Graham," he continued, almost leering. "You'll be the one under the most pressure when the inevitable tour happens."

Will wondered briefly if it was too late to run away, far away from all of this. *Argentina might be nice at this time of year,* he thought idly, before shaking the irritation off.

"I'll be fine, Matthew," he replied coolly, and he didn't miss the look of amusement that Beverly gave him. He very deliberately ignored the both of them, until Matthew left them to head back to his own work.

"What is it with you, Will?" Beverly asked, still looking just as amused. "You've got your mystery boyfriend, and now there's Matthew looking at you like he's on the verge of devouring you whole."

"I don't have a mystery boyfriend," Will said as he stood from the table, carrying his rubbish to the bin. "And I have no good answer about Matthew. Though I'm hoping he just stays with looks."

He dusted his hands off, throwing his jacket back on as he moved to head back to work, the sound of Beverly's laughter ringing in his ears.

~*~*~

Will moved his way around the greenhouse, deciding that now was as good a time as any to make sure there was nothing major that needed to be looked at before this fundraiser. He was so engrossed in his work that he failed to notice the shape moving along the path behind him, until he stepped back and straight into the man.

"Oh god, I am so sorry," he started, trailing off in flustered surprise as he looked up into the face of the artist. He mentally cursed the man for never keeping to a set schedule, so that Will would know if he was there at any given time, before noticing that the man had grabbed Will's shoulders to steady him in the collision, and had yet to release them.

"I didn't mean to startle you," the man said, his voice soft and accented. Will blinked in surprise.

"No, no, it was my fault. I should have looked where I was going. Please, don't let me hold you up any longer," he replied, somehow unwilling to move. He was dimly aware of the way the man's fingers dragged, ever so slightly, down Will's arms as he lowered his hands.

"I assure you, you are not holding me up."

He smiled, just a faint turning up of the corners of his mouth. Will stared, realised he was staring, and looked away.

"You do good work here," the man continued, looking around. "I feel ferneries are vastly underrated. The rest of this greenhouse is equally well-kept, but I must confess a particular fondness for this section."

“Thanks,” Will stammered, unsure why this virtual stranger was having such an effect on him. “It's unusual to find people who appreciate them as much as they do the more colourful plants.”

“That is their loss, I feel. If one cannot appreciate the quiet beauty of something without it being pointed out in a garish display, then they are not worth the effort.”

Will wasn't entirely sure how to respond to that, so he remained quiet. He snuck a look at the man, wondering as he always did where he found his clothes. Every day that he turned up, he was outfitted in plaid three-piece suits, never so much as a hair out of place, and today was no different. It was...*intriguing.*

“You left one of your drawings here a while ago,” Will blurted out, inwardly wincing even as he spoke. That was most decidedly *not* what he had intended to say.

“Did you like it?” the man asked, seemingly unembarrassed at all about it.

“I. I don't know. No one has ever drawn me before. Why did you draw me?”

“I like beauty, and I like to capture its likeness as well as I can. You are one of the more beautiful things I have seen here.”

Will could practically feel his face igniting. The man tilted his head slightly, evidently picking up on Will's discomfort.

“Does it bother you, to be told by a stranger that you are beautiful?”

“Yes!”

“May I enquire as to why?”

Will didn't know how to answer that question. He didn't know how he'd gotten himself into a conversation like this at all, and now that he was here he didn't know how to leave it.

“I. You don't just tell people things like that! Unless this is something you do a lot?”

“It's not something I make a habit of, no. But you must be aware of the way you look?”

Will gaped at the man in front of him. He'd never truly understood what it meant to feel flummoxed, but that seemed to be exactly the word for how he was feeling now.

“No?” he said helplessly, wishing desperately that someone would come walking around the corner and save him from the waves of embarrassment he found himself drowning in.

“I assure you, Will, that you are an exquisite example of the human species.”

Will stood, blinking in disbelief.

“Um.”

“I fear I have said too much for one day. Perhaps I will see you when I return tomorrow?”

“Yes?” It wasn't lost on Will that he had been reduced to one word answers, but there seemed to be very little he could do about it.

“My name is Hannibal,” the man said, holding out his hand for Will to shake. Will obliged, gripping the offered hand.

“Until tomorrow, then.”

It was only as Hannibal walked away that Will realised that he had known his name.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“How does he know my *name,* Beverly?” Will demanded, not expecting an answer so much as wanting to let out some of the tension that had been building up since he had seen the man. *Hannibal*, he supposed he should be calling him now that he knew his name.

“And what sort of name is Hannibal anyway?” he continued, lifting his beer bottle to his lips to wash away the taste of Hannibal's name.

Beverly had all but dragged Will to her apartment for beer and pizza, and truth be told Will was grateful to her for it. He'd spent the entire afternoon obsessively going over everything he could remember about Hannibal, trying to work out *why* he seemed to have attracted the other man's attention, but so far he'd come up with nothing.

“Do you always get like this whenever someone compliments you?” Bev asked, as amused as she'd ever been about the whole situation. “From what you've told me, all he's done is say you're hot – which you are, by the way, don't think I haven't noticed – and complimented your work.”

“Yeah, easy for you to say. You're not the one who has him turning up and being creepy and drawing pictures of you.”

Will was surly. What made him even *more* surly was the fact that he wasn't exactly sure that he didn't hate the attention. It was sort of...*nice.* Not that he had any intention of telling Bev that, or even acknowledging it to himself on any fundamental level. There had to be something seriously wrong with him, if even a part of him thought that attracting that sort of attention was a *good* thing.

Bev snorted.

“Honestly Will, just tell him you aren't interested and that it's making you uncomfortable, he'll back off. And if he doesn't, I'm sure Matthew and I can come to your rescue. I bet Matthew would *love* to have that opportunity,” she said with a smirk.

“Yeah, yeah, laugh it up, Katz.”

“I'm serious though, Will. If he's bothering you that much, just tell him to back off.”

“No, it's fine,” Will huffed. “It just threw me, is all. I still don't know where he got my name from. It's not like I ever have a name tag on or anything.”

“He probably just asked someone. It's not exactly hard to find out any of our names, Will.”

She was right, Will knew. It just got to him that someone had been paying so much attention to him while he knew nothing about *them*. It was disconcerting. And god knew it didn't take

much to knock Will off his carefully maintained balance these days, as Alana Bloom had so kindly pointed out to him those months ago.

The two of them sat in companionable silence, eating the remains of their pizza, before Will got up to leave. The drawback to living out in the middle of nowhere was that he had to leave everywhere early if he wanted to get any amount of sleep. Bev saw him to the front door, waving him off with a quick hug.

“We'll get it all sorted, Will. Don't you worry.”

“Thanks, Bev.”

It didn't really make Will feel any better, especially since he still didn't want to tell Bev the precise reason for his discomfort, but he appreciated the effort.

The drive home was uneventful, and by the time Will arrived at his front door, dogs pouring out in greeting and admonishment for his late return, he felt a little more settled. All day though, it had been a struggle to get Hannibal out of his thoughts, and that didn't change as he prepared the dogs' food, memories of that soft voice calling him 'beautiful' echoing and distracting him from his task.

~*~*~

Will had spent all week cleaning up his greenhouse – which, in his opinion was unnecessary and detracted from what he had taken to thinking of as the understated beauty of the place – until it finally met up to the exacting standards set for him by Doctor du Maurier. She hadn't come in to check it herself, thankfully, but he knew if her instructions weren't followed and she saw it tonight there would be words had, and he was most assuredly not in the mood for that.

So wrapped up in his work was he that he had barely seen Hannibal through the week, and despite himself he felt...not disappointed, as such, but certainly like he had missed out on something. It only served to increase his irritation at everything around him, and when he found himself snapping at one of his students over something that was barely worth noticing he knew it was time to get out of the place for a few hours. He was going to have to be back that night for the insufferable fund raiser anyway, so it seemed the best idea to try and get away and ground himself again.

He snatched up his jacket, eyes trained on the ground and swept his way out of his office and onto the path of the greenhouse. That was his mistake, really, being in too much of a hurry to leave. He came to an abrupt stop as strong hands gripped his shoulders. Again. It was the second time in the space of a week and Will was *mortified* when he looked up to find Hannibal, because of course it was Hannibal, looking down at him with undisguised amusement crossing his features.

“Good afternoon, Will. We seem to be making a habit of meeting this way.”

“I'm sorry,” Will quickly said, trying his best to avoid being in this situation any longer than he had to be. He didn't think he could cope with another embarrassing situation courtesy of

the man before him. “I don't know what's gotten into me lately. I don't normally crash into people like this.”

“Please, don't apologise,” Hannibal replied, finally letting go of Will's arms. Will most definitely did *not* briefly lament the heat that Hannibal's hands had left. “It was my fault, this time. I was looking for you, and thought maybe you might be in your office. I didn't realise you would be in such a hurry, and I got in your way unintentionally.”

“You were looking for me?”

“Does that surprise you?”

“Yeah. People generally don't come looking for me. Especially not people who barely know me.”

Will immediately regretted his terse tone when he saw the way Hannibal's face briefly went blank, but he couldn't find it in himself to apologise. Not for this, anyway. It was Hannibal's own fault for acting like they had the sort of relationship where it was appropriate to come looking for him in his own workspace. Or like they had any sort of relationship at all, for that matter.

Hannibal's expression rippled again, almost as though he were literally wiping it clean, and the amused look returned.

“I merely wished to ask if you would be attending tonight's fund raising event,” he said, hands now folded neatly in front of him. “I understand that plants are auctioned off, and if there are going to be some of your ferns available, I may reconsider my intention to turn down the invitation.”

“You were invited?”

Will groaned inwardly as Hannibal nodded. On one hand it would be good to have someone who appreciated his ferns. On the other...it would be about right that this man, who was already showing what was possibly an unhealthy amount of attention to Will, would be part of that set of people who seemed to go out of their way to drive him crazy. Again, Will chose not to wonder *why* this would bother him so much, if he had no interest of any kind in getting to know Hannibal.

“Yes, I'll be there,” he sighed, before adding, “and I'll even be in a suit.”

He could have kicked himself when he heard the strangely hopeful tone in his voice. The warmth that began to pool in his belly when Hannibal smiled distracted him from that, and left him thoroughly confused.

“In which case, I hope to see you tonight, Will.”

Will watched as Hannibal smiled once more, then turned and strode out of the greenhouse. He stood there for a few minutes, unsure of how he should react to the sudden surge of anticipation that had flooded through him.

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“Bev, I need your help.”

Will barged his way into Beverly's office, flopping down in one of the spare chairs.

“Well this is unexpected. Since when do you ever ask for my help? I usually have to make you accept it.”

“Which suit should I wear tonight?”

Beverly's jaw dropped, her eyebrows rising in surprise.

“Don't look at me like that,” Will said, refusing to look her in the face. “I'm asking you because you always have an opinion about these things.”

“I just never thought – never mind. I'm not even going to ask. What are you going for?”

“What do you mean, what am I going for? I have two suits. I just want to know which one is the better one to wear tonight.”

“Well, the blue one is fun. I like that one. You look more classically suave in the black one though, especially if you were to wear it with that black shirt you've got.”

Will thought of the shirt Beverly was referring to. He'd never actually worn it with a suit – had barely worn it at all, in fact – but he could see where it would work. He nodded slowly.

“Maybe the black one then,” he said, pretending he couldn't see the questioning look on Beverly's face.

“Is there someone coming tonight that you haven't mentioned yet, Will?”

“No!” he said, a little too quickly. “I'm just. I don't know. Maybe I'll tell you once I sort it out in my own head.”

He stood up, smiling briefly at Bev.

“You better tell me what's up with you, Will. If I didn't know better I'd say it has to do with your main topic of conversation lately, but I do know better. Don't I?”

Will just smiled again, leaving the office with a muttered thanks.

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Will paced idly, finger tugging at the tie around this neck almost of its own accord. He looked around, but couldn't see Hannibal anywhere. It looked like everyone else who was expected to be there had already arrived, with the exception of Hannibal and their host, Bedelia.

“Stop it, Will. Your tie is fine, and if you don't keep tugging at it like that you'll pull it off completely,” Beverly hissed at him. Matthew hovered nearby, watching Will with unblinking

eyes. It made his skin crawl, and he shifted so that Beverly was between them.

“I'm just not used to wearing them,” he answered distractedly, eyes scanning the crowd of people once more. Maybe Hannibal wasn't going to show up, after all. He wasn't sure if he was pleased about that or not. Especially since he'd gone to all the trouble of wearing the black suit, and had even taken Bev's advice and paired it with the black shirt and tie. Bev had whistled when she'd seen him, which he counted as a win, but he wasn't sure he was prepared to actually see Hannibal, not like this.

And he still couldn't figure out exactly why he cared so much.

“Who are you looking for?” Bev asked him, following his gaze and seeing no one of particular interest.

“No one. There was someone who said they might come, and I was just curious if they would or not.”

Bev didn't answer Will, but looked at him more carefully, as though she were trying to work him out. Will had no doubt that given enough time she would. He was having enough trouble hiding his nerves as it was, and if Hannibal *did* show up, then it would all be over.

“Doctor du Maurier is here,” came Matthew's bored voice, clearly aimed at Will. “And she's brought a date. Maybe now we can finally get this over with.”

Will looked over towards the door, only to find himself frozen in disbelief. On Bedelia's arm was none other than Hannibal, dressed up even more than usual in a tux, looking every inch Bedelia's claim.

“Will!” Beverly smacked Will's arm as she spoke, shocking him out of his surprise. “Did you know that they were together?”

Will opened his mouth, but found himself unable to reply to her. He most assuredly did *not* know that. He was quite sure his face had lost some of it's colour, if the queasy feeling in his stomach was anything to go by.

“Wait. Was *he* the one you were waiting for?” Beverly asked incredulously. “I thought you said you hated him?”

“I said he was creepy and weird,” Will answered finally, too distracted to really pay much attention to what Beverly was saying. He was aware of the way Matthew had crept closer, looking with interest between Will and Hannibal, but did his best to ignore him.

“Oh, Will,” Beverly whispered, more to herself than to Will, but he heard it anyway.

“It's not like that,” he protested, but it sounded weak, even to himself. It was becoming painfully clear to him that at some point since Hannibal had left the drawing of him, his opinion of the man had started to shift. He should probably be glad that it was being forcibly nipped in the bud, before it had had a chance to flourish into something he had no control over. He watched, his limbs suddenly feeling much heavier than they had only moments

before, as Bedelia and Hannibal made their way to the front of the crowd, people's conversations dropping as she prepared to address them.

“Thank you all for coming tonight. I will keep this introduction short, as I'm sure you're all dying to get to the canapés. As you all know, the reason we are having this fund raiser and gathering tonight is because we have the very special honour of having our biggest single donor with us tonight. It gives me great pleasure to introduce you all to Doctor Hannibal Lecter.”

Bedelia stepped back as people began applauding, Hannibal stepping forward with a gracious nod. Will felt dazed, and that feeling intensified when he met Hannibal's eyes, the other man's face visibly brightening when he saw Will.

“Did you know he was a Lecter?” Beverly asked, breaking Will's reverie. Will shook his head slowly.

“You know this means he's probably *not* Bedelia's date, right?” Beverly asked, a thin undercurrent of suppressed excitement in her tone. Will didn't want to think of that, so he chose to ignore that particular comment. He watched instead as Hannibal leaned down to whisper into Bedelia's ear, the latter's face growing stony as she heard whatever it was that he had said. She gave a nod, then began guiding Hannibal towards the back of the room. Towards *Will.* His palms grew unreasonably sweaty as Hannibal drew closer, and he shoved them into his pockets.

Bedelia and Hannibal stopped in front of them, and Will was not blind to the playful spark in Hannibal's eyes.

“Good evening, Will,” he said, his voice strong and clear. It sent butterflies rioting in Will's stomach. He swallowed.

“Good evening, Doctor Lecter.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey, we're starting to get somewhere! Thank you everyone who left those lovely comments ♥

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal go for a walk.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is from Hannibal's POV, which I *never* write because to be quite honest I generally find it far too intimidating. But here we have a chapter like that anyway. I hope you enjoy :D

If anyone is wondering what exactly Will's suit looks like, imagine a slightly scruffier, less well-fitting version of this.

It wasn't lost on Hannibal, the way Bedelia had staked her claim on him just as they entered the hall where the main part of the gathering was taking place. It was that, more than any promises from the man himself, that left Hannibal sure that he would be seeing Will here tonight. His careful prodding for information about the botanist – not nearly as careful as he could have been, Hannibal was only too happy to admit, but careful all the same – had been very clearly noticed by Bedelia. In truth, he wasn't sure that it *wasn't* his intention for her to be very clear about his...*interest* in the man.

Hannibal kept his eyes fixed firmly ahead of him as they strode through the crowd, Bedelia gently but definitely tugging him along with her. Clearly he was the prize to be shown off. He wasn't particularly uncomfortable with the thought, but he would have preferred to have had some say in the matter himself. It was of no concern though, not once he turned to scan the crowd and spied Will standing at the back. He smiled in pleasure at the stricken look on his face, before allowing his eyes to roam over what he could see of Will's body. He had spoken the truth then, when he had mentioned wearing a suit. The jacket, though clearly not tailored, still hugged his form nicely, and the choice of a black shirt and black tie made a pleasing change from Will's normal work shirts.

Bedelia finished her introduction and Hannibal stepped forward, meeting Will's eyes as he nodded. He allowed his smile to widen fractionally, aware that he had momentarily lost control of himself and let through more pleasure at the sight in front of him than he had intended. It should bother him.

It didn't.

He leaned down to whisper into Bedelia's ear, unable to resist the temptation that had laid itself out so willingly in front of him.

“I think it is time that Will and I are properly introduced, don't you?”

Hannibal knew that part of his desire to involve Bedelia in his interest was just curiosity. Curiosity over how she would react, what she would do, both to Will and to Hannibal himself. She had spent years manoeuvring herself into position, to gain more control over various aspects of Baltimore high society life, and Hannibal was a major component of this. For him to be distracted by a scruffy gardener, as Bedelia saw Will, was not a desirable outcome.

“I hope you know what you're doing, Hannibal,” she murmured through a forced smile.

“When do I not, my dear?” he answered mildly, following her as they moved through the crowd. Despite himself, he felt excitement welling up in him as he took note of Will's apparent nervousness, amused by the way Will hurriedly shoved his hands into his pockets.

“Good evening, Will,” he said, unable to keep his delight entirely out of his voice.

“Good evening, Doctor Lecter.”

The reproach in his voice was clear, even to those around them, the way he all but spat out the name in disgust.

“I apologise for not letting you know who I am, Will. It was pleasant being anonymous, if only for a time.”

Will's face softened briefly, and Hannibal took advantage of that small opening.

“Please, introduce me to your colleagues. I have seen them around, but have not had the pleasure of properly meeting them.”

Will turned, clearly flustered. Hannibal savoured the sight of that slight tinge of pink that crept up his neck. It wasn't nearly as obvious as the first time they had spoken and Will had been rendered all but speechless, but it was alluring all the same.

“This is Beverly Katz. She's a botanist as well.”

Hannibal reached for the woman's hand, raising it to brush his lips briefly across her knuckles, maintaining eye contact with her all the while.

“A pleasure, Ms Katz,” he said gently, entertained by the smile that bloomed across her face. He carefully released her hand, turning further to look at the other man next to her. This one was different, of that Hannibal was very aware. He had barely stopped staring at Hannibal since he had entered the building, and when he had it was only to turn his gaze onto Will.

“That's Matthew Brown, our horticulturalist,” Will continued, gesturing vaguely in Matthew's direction.

“Good to meet you, Mr Brown,” Hannibal said coolly, holding out a hand that Matthew very conspicuously did not take.

“Doctor Lecter.”

The glint in Matthew's eyes was dangerous, and Hannibal had no doubts at all as to what caused it. He resisted the urge to point out how uncomfortable Will looked every time the man looked at him, but he decided it would be worth keeping an eye on him all the same. *After* tonight, that was.

“Will, would you mind giving us a tour of the grounds? I'm familiar with the Lecter Greenhouse, as you are aware, but I have yet to see the rest of the Gardens in any detail. Ms Katz, perhaps your expertise could be added as well.”

“Mr Brown is the one who has the most to do with each area,” Bedelia said, her interjection as expected as Hannibal had thought it might be. “Perhaps he would be the best to lead this tour for you, Hannibal.”

Hannibal smiled and turned, not so subtly discounting Matthew from his attention.

“I believe Mr Graham and Ms Katz are more than adequate for this task,” he said dismissively. He shifted his gaze to Will, admiring once again the man's astounding beauty. He'd had ample opportunity to observe the man, both before and after their first official meeting, and Hannibal wasn't so blind to his own thoughts and feelings as to be able to fool himself into thinking that his interest was still purely aesthetic. Will Graham intrigued him in a way that no one had for a very long time, if ever. He smiled, and was happy when Will smiled back in thanks at Hannibal's refusal to allow Matthew Brown to join them.

“Do you wish to join us, Bedelia? Or shall I monopolise these two's company myself?”

He was in a hurry to find a way to get Will alone, but he couldn't resist taking the opportunity to poke Bedelia just a little more. Her cold smile told him that she knew exactly what he was up to, but she merely nodded in acquiescence.

“After you, Hannibal. I'm curious to see what exactly our Will has to show us.”

Hannibal smiled despite himself, impressed as always at Bedelia's ability to get the last word in. The others in the small group, including Matthew Brown who was by now uninterested in hiding his disdain for Hannibal, looked mystified as to the needled exchange between the two of them.

“Ms Katz, perhaps you would like to escort Doctor du Maurier on this tour?”

Beverly smiled even as Will had to suppress a choke, and she very quickly moved next to Bedelia.

“Come on, Doctor. I bet we can have this tour nailed before those two even make it through the door.”

Will's face drained of its colour again, and he glared at Beverly. His obvious emotional changes were doing nothing to deter Hannibal's interest in him; quite the opposite, in fact. The rise and fall of that red flush was endearing, to say the least. Hannibal decided to see how far he could push, and placed his hand on the small of Will's back to guide him forwards. The stiffening of his muscles told Hannibal that this was perhaps a step too far, so once Will began moving he allowed his arm to fall back to his side. He followed Will in silence as they left the hall, and crossed the cold courtyard towards the greenhouses.

“I suppose you don't want to see your one,” Will said gruffly, his hands still firmly in his pockets.

“I would be pleased to see whatever you choose to show me, Will.”

“What exactly do you do, to be able to afford pouring the money that you do into this place?”

Hannibal raised an eyebrow at the sudden change of topic, but didn't comment on it. He waited until they drew level with each other again before speaking, both of them looking ahead at the grounds rather than at each other as they spoke.

“My family left me rather a large sum when they died. I invested it, and over the years it grew larger. I never had need to spend it, as I made a comfortable living first as a surgeon, then until recently as a psychiatrist.”

“Until recently?”

“A man attacked a patient of mine, as well as me, in my office. I survived, they did not. It seemed as good a time as any to take an extended leave of absence, and do something different. I have always enjoyed art, and so I have spent the last six months indulging in my childhood passion.”

“I'm sorry,” Will said softly, and Hannibal knew it was genuine. What interested him more than Will's very real empathy though, was the flash of interest that though quickly dampened, was not suppressed quickly enough to escape his notice. *Interesting, indeed,* he thought, filing the reaction away to examine more closely later.

“There is nothing to be sorry for. In some ways, I am quite glad that my life has taken this turn.”

And he was. He'd always stayed well away from this place, only keeping the donation up in the memory of his sister. But if he hadn't come here, he would never have met the wholly fascinating man next to him.

They strolled along in silence once more, save for the times Will would point out a group of plants here, or a smaller greenhouse there. Their breath puffed out in the cold, plumes of mist twisting and joining and vanishing into the darkness.

“Are you aware of the poison garden of Alnwick, in the United Kingdom?” Hannibal asked conversationally.

“I've heard of it, never been though,” Will answered, looking askance at Hannibal.

“I've often thought it would be of much use, if only for the shock value, to have something similar here. I've contemplated giving the money to have one opened here, though there never seemed to be anyone trustworthy enough to take charge of it.”

“We already have a carnivorous plant collection. Isn't that enough?”

Hannibal grinned at Will's flippant response, enjoying the way the man was very deliberately not rising to the bait.

“I am also lead to believe that the Titan Arum here is showing signs of blooming,” he continued, taking Will's lead and dropping the subject. There was plenty of time yet to bring him around to that one.

“It is,” Will said, tone changing drastically. This was clearly something that excited him. “I wasn't here the last time it bloomed, so this will be a new experience for me.”

“It certainly lived up to its colloquial name the last time. I can't recall ever smelling anything quite like it.”

Will grinned, relaxing now that they were in safer conversational territory.

“I'm looking forward to it.”

He paused for a second, mouth open as though to speak before thinking better of it, before he evidently changed his mind again and continued.

“Are you going to be here when it does? I mean, are you going to come and see it again?”

“Of course,” Hannibal replied. “How could I miss seeing something like that, especially when given the opportunity to watch someone else seeing it for the first time?”

Will shot him a sharp look, then stopped walking.

“I don't know if it's worth showing you all these outside gardens. Most of it is either covered up or frosted over. Plus my toes are getting cold. I wasn't really thinking about walking in the snow when I put these shoes on.”

Will stamped his ill-shod feet, and Hannibal could see why they would be giving him trouble in the cold temperatures they were currently standing it.

“My apologies once again, Will. I didn't stop to think of your comfort before dragging you out here.”

Will just waved him off, finally pulling his hands out of his pockets only to blow warm air onto his fingers. They stood in silence a moment longer, Hannibal watching as Will stared fiercely at a patch of snow in front of him.

“Maybe later on this week, you could come and I could give you a proper tour. In the daylight when everything is unlocked, so you can actually see.”

Hannibal was surprised at the unsure way in which Will asked his question, but he was filled with anticipation all the same.

“I would like that very much, Will.”

Together they turned, and made their way back towards the warmth.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

The auction.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

How Hannibal managed to look so unbothered by the cold was beyond Will. His own fingers felt like they were going to freeze off, and the less said about his toes, the better. Then again, Will figured that Hannibal could probably afford to buy shoes that actually managed to keep the cold out.

They approached the hall once more, and Hannibal surprised Will by holding the door open for him.

“Thanks,” Will mumbled, not flustered as such but certainly put off-balance by the gesture. Hannibal merely smiled and dipped his head, following Will through the door and back into the warmth. Will half expected Hannibal's hand to settle on his lower back again, braced for it in fact, but disappointment flooded him when the touch didn't arrive. He shook it off, looking around instead for Beverly, but found instead to his surprise that Alana was approaching him.

“Hi, Will,” she said, smiling. “And Hannibal! I arrived late, but I heard you had finally decided to put in an appearance.”

Will felt more than a little uncomfortable watching the two of them greet each other, unaware that they knew each other at all. There were faint tendrils of jealously stirring within him, and what left him particularly lost was the fact that he didn't know exactly which one of them he was jealous of.

“Will?”

He was startled back to attention by Alana's questioning smile and Hannibal's open gaze.

“Sorry, I zoned out for a second,” he answered, wondering what he had missed. Alana seemed to be waiting for the answer to a question he hadn't heard at all.

“You'll have to forgive poor Will,” Hannibal interjected, giving Will another small smile. “He was just indulging me in my need to see more of the grounds, and I'm afraid I kept him out in the cold longer than I should have.”

“Don't let this one intimidate you into anything, Will,” Alana said, a wide smile removing any true warning from her words. “Just because they decided to spring him on you like this doesn't mean he can take advantage of you.”

“Are you casting aspersions, Alana?” Hannibal teased with a smile of his own.

“Of course not.”

Alana placed her hand on Hannibal's forearm, the two of them smiling indulgently at each other. Despite his best efforts, Will could feel his hackles rising at the easy intimacy they shared. He was very aware of how ridiculous and unreasonable it was to feel that way, and yet he seemed unable to do anything about it. He cast about for an excuse to remove himself from the situation when they were interrupted by a woman carrying two wine glasses.

“There you are,” she said, holding one glass out for Alana to take. “And who do we have here?”

The woman stared unashamedly at Will and Hannibal, one hand snaking around Alana's waist as she raised her glass to her lips.

“Margot, this is Hannibal Lecter, an old friend of mine. This is Will Graham. I was Will's mentor while he was studying. Will, Hannibal, this is Margot Verger.”

“Pleased to meet you both,” Margot said, releasing Alana to briefly shake the two men's hands.

“Verger. Of *the* Vergers?” Hannibal asked, interest sparking in his eyes.

“One and the same,” Margot answered, vague boredom colouring her tone.

“I was very sorry to hear about your brother.”

“Thanks,” she answered, seeming to Will to be anything but sorry about what had happened to her brother. “He's in a better place now, I'm sure.”

That by now familiar glint of amusement crossed Hannibal's face once more, and Will was suddenly very curious to find out what exactly happened to Margot's brother. He was acquainted with the Verger name, and he was aware that one of them had recently passed away, though no details were never made public.

“Will, can I get you a drink?” Hannibal asked, turning his attention back towards him.

“I probably shouldn't. Technically I'm still working, and the auction will be starting soon.”

“All the more reason to keep your hands occupied.”

Hannibal turned and strode away, leaving Will feeling more uncomfortable than ever. He hadn't really spoken to Alana in a few weeks, not since he had tried asking her out and been firmly, though kindly, shut down.

“How have you been, Will?”

“Fine. Just working, you know.”

“I'm glad. And I see you've finally had a chance to meet Hannibal.”

“Yeah. Actually, we met a little while ago. He comes here a lot. Not that I had any idea who he was, at the time. He kept that little bit of information to himself.”

Alana's eyebrows rose in surprise.

“He never mentioned coming here.”

“Should he have?” Will answered a little testily.

“I'm just surprised, is all. He's always been very against coming here, though he's never said why.”

Will chose not to respond to that, instead keeping an eye out for Hannibal. It seemed the man was right – a drink was very much needed right now.

“Listen, Will. About the other week -”

“It's fine, Alana.”

Will cut Alana off before she could bring the whole situation back up. He could see the pity in her eyes, and it was something he absolutely did not need. And in any case, he'd worked through it. He'd been hurt at the time, especially when she'd mentioned his apparent *instability*, as she'd put it, but he also couldn't argue with her. She was right, and if she was already involved with someone, then Will just had to accept that and move on. And he had, much to his surprise. He felt the tension drain away as he realised that fact, and smiled at her.

“Seriously, Alana. It's all fine.”

He smiled more at the look of relief on her face, glad to have the ice thaw so he could have his friend and mentor back. He was distracted by movement over her shoulder, and shifted his attention to see Hannibal making his way over with two glasses.

“You seem like more of a whiskey man than wine, so that's what I've got you. I hope you don't mind.”

Will gratefully took the offered glass from Hannibal's hand, a tiny shiver coursing down his spine when their fingers grazed. He couldn't begin to imagine how Hannibal had worked that out about him after three very brief meetings, and he found that he didn't really care.

“Thanks,” he said, nursing the glass in both hands. “And no, I don't mind. You're absolutely right. I do prefer this.”

He took a sip, savouring the taste of whiskey that was of a far higher quality than the type he normally bought for himself. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Hannibal watching,

and found himself flushing.

Again.

“What's got you turning all red?” a voice whispered in his ear, and he nearly dropped his drink in startlement. Beverly laughed, and Will scowled at her.

“Sorry!” Beverly raised her hands in apology but didn't stop grinning at Will. “Not that I don't know, anyway,” she continued, voice still pitched low, shooting a brief but significant look between Alana and Hannibal.

“How are you, Alana?” she said, denying Will the chance to even attempt to deny anything. The two women embraced briefly, and Will stopped paying attention when the introductions started again. He didn't realise how lost in his own head he was until Hannibal gently touched his elbow, drawing his attention back to him.

“The auction is starting, Will. I plan to buy a few plants, so I must leave you here for now. Perhaps once it is over, you can help explain what exactly I've bought?”

Will smiled at the unexpectedly weak excuse offered by Hannibal to see him again and nodded, watching as the man turned and made his way back to the front of the room. He doubted very much that Hannibal would not know exactly what he was buying, but found he cared as much about his flimsy reasons as he did about the fact that the man seemed to have a greater unexplained insight into him than people he'd known for years.

“What'd you bring for the auction?” Bev interrupted his reverie and a quick glance showed Will that his friend was very much aware of what she was doing.

“Mounted a couple of staghorn ferns a while back,” he said, taking another sip of his drink. “They're well enough established now that I thought someone might like them on their wall.”

“Ten bucks says Lecter buys the lot of them,” Bev smirked. “That man is so obviously gaga over you, Will.”

He turned to her, aghast, and checked to make sure Alana hadn't heard. To his relief she appeared to be deep in conversation with Margot.

“He really isn't,” he hissed.

“He is. And I think you're just as gone on him, aren't you?”

“I'm not *gone* on anyone, Beverly.”

“You like him though, don't you?”

“He's interesting,” was all Will was willing to commit to, but he he knew the answer was a very definite yes. He just wasn't ready to admit that to anyone else just yet. He had no idea how he had so quickly changed his attitude towards Hannibal, and yet that's exactly what had happened.

“Hey, Bedelia's starting the auction. Looks like your ferns are up first.”

Despite himself, Will strained to see if it really would be Hannibal who bought the ferns. He'd be lying if he said that he hoped he didn't, and the anticipation had him jittery all of a sudden. He watched as his plants were introduced. He was quietly pleased with the mounting, and the way the fronds branched out and down, thick and lush. They looked so very like their namesakes. He expected that someone would be happy to have them up on their wall.

What he was not expecting was the opening bid to be one thousand dollars.

Each.

A hushed murmur rippled through the assembled crowd as the accented voice rang out, and Beverly thumped Will's arm so hard he almost fell over. Alana looked at him with wide, confused eyes while Margot gazed on in interest, clearly unsure what to make of the entire situation but entertained by it nonetheless. Will was utterly unsurprised when no one tried to outbid Hannibal, and the plants were sold with a stuttery, bemused smattering of applause from the watching audience.

Will shoved his glass into Beverly's hand then pushed his way through the crowd, ignoring her calls to him. This was *ridiculous*. There was no way he could let Hannibal do this. He reached out as he drew closer, taking Hannibal's upper arm and turning him so they were facing each other. Hannibal looked unquestionably pleased with himself.

“We need to talk,” hissed Will, tugging on Hannibal's arm and pulling him to a quieter corner of the room.

“What are you doing?” he asked, only releasing Hannibal once they were far enough away from everyone else to be able to speak freely.

“I wanted those plants. I thought it easiest to make sure no one would try to outbid me.”

“Those ferns, even at completely jacked up prices, are worth a tenth of that, at most! And if you wanted them so badly, I could just mount you some myself!”

“Will.”

Will could almost scream at the infuriatingly placid way Hannibal said his name, almost as though he were actively trying to calm Will down himself. Which, given the way Will was shaking with barely contained feelings, was probably not too far from the truth.

“This is a fundraising event, is it not? There would be little point in my trying to get something for free, when the entire point of this exercise is to make money for the gardens. Money which I can easily afford to spend, by the way.”

He reached up as he spoke, gently running his fingers along the side of Will's head, only just making contact; but the touch, as light as it was, caused Will to freeze. All too soon the contact ended, Hannibal's hand dropping back to his side, but the desired effect had been

achieved. Will calmed, feeling it as every bit of tension drained from him. He sighed, longing for just a second more of those fingers on his skin.

“Perhaps,” Hannibal said, looking almost unsure for the first time since Will had known him. “Perhaps you could help me hang them. If you're free at all. Any time this week would work for me.”

Will looked closely at his face, finding nothing but honest enquiry, and the shadows of apprehension in Hannibal's eyes. He smiled.

“I'd love to.”

Chapter End Notes

I couldn't resist having Will trying to flog off staghorn ferns. I'm so sorry.

If you're unfamiliar with them, staghorn ferns look really cool when they're mounted and hung on the wall

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Will talks with Beverly while Bedelia helps Hannibal work out what exactly he does feel for Will.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"So tell me," Bedelia said, taking a swallow from her glass as she leaned back in Hannibal's armchair. "How did your personal tour of the gardens with Will Graham go today?"

"Much more pleasing than the night of the auction," he answered, lowering himself into the chair opposite her, his own wineglass cradled gently in one hand. "It makes a difference, having the sun on one's face."

He smiled to himself, only a small one, but still noticed by Bedelia even as he tried to hide it behind a sip of wine.

"What are your intentions with him, Hannibal?"

Bedelia's voice was perfectly calm and even, but Hannibal could still detect a very strong undercurrent of curiosity, tinged with concern. Not concern for him, of course. Concern for herself, for her plans, maybe. Not for him, not for Will. That was just fine.

"I find him intriguing."

He glanced at Bedelia, gauging her reaction, and was entirely unsurprised to see that her face didn't shift from its placid mask at all.

"I would not have picked him as someone you would find intriguing. Why does he intrigue you?"

"I confess his physical appearance is what initially drew my attention. I don't think I've ever met anyone as classically beautiful as he is."

"And that's all there is to it, is there?"

Hannibal stilled for a moment, unsure how much he should be revealing. He *wanted* to talk endlessly about Will; about his beauty, his intelligence, his effortless ability to look at Hannibal and truly *see* him in a way no one else ever had. He was not sure that was wise. Not since he was only just coming to realise these things for himself.

“Once he learned who I was, I expected his attitude towards me to change. It didn't. It was refreshing, to not have someone suddenly become deferential and sycophantic because of my position. Did I tell you he told me off for spending so much on the ferns?” he went with a half lie, but smiled at the memory it conjured.

“I must admit, Hannibal, this unusual for you. I've seen how much you appreciate people not giving you what you feel adequate respect. I wouldn't have thought I'd ever see you not only tolerate it, but actively encourage it.”

“Will is...different.”

“I can see that.”

They lapsed into silence, each lost in their own thoughts. Hannibal was aware of Bedelia's calculating gaze on him, and allowed his features to relax in response. The truth was, Will *was* different. He could feel it the moment he first heard him speak, watched him interact with others, and that impression just grew stronger the more he got to know him. He was more than just intrigued by Will; he was becoming aware that he was actively drawn to him, and this was a situation that he had never found himself in.

“I've asked him to come and help hang my new acquisitions. I had thought to perhaps ask him to stay for dinner, after it is done.”

“And again I say: I hope you know what you're doing, Hannibal.”

Hannibal had no idea what he was doing. He knew what he *wanted* to do, but Will was turning out to be so delightfully unpredictable that he had no idea if his plans were working or not. It was delicious, and disconcerting, and he wanted more of it.

“Of course,” was all he said, tipping the remains of his drink into his mouth. Bedelia followed his example, draining her own glass before standing to leave. Hannibal walked her to the door, watching as she made her way to her car. He closed the door, not feeling as satisfied with the quiet and solitude as he normally did. He had no doubts at all that it was the result of spending the greater part of the afternoon with Will, casually wandering the gardens with no fixed agenda beyond enjoying each other's company and seeing all the plants there were to see.

And enjoy Will's company he very much did. He was sure the feeling was reciprocated, at least for a while, if the way Will shivered slightly but didn't flinch away when Hannibal walked close enough to allow their arms to brush was any indication. He had particularly enjoyed the enthusiasm with which Will had taken him to see the *Amorphophallus titanum,* watching indulgently as he had called Ms Katz over to help explain what they were looking for.

“It's nearing the end of its dormant period,” she had been saying, but Hannibal couldn't tear his eyes away from the way Will's face had lit up with every step they had taken around the place. He was divine, in every possible way.

He shook the memories off, storing them in his mind where he could easily access them later. Now was not the time for what, if he were anyone else, he would term pining. No, now was the time for planning. He picked up his phone, sending Will a quick thank you text, and slipping in an invitation for dinner. He had an idea about what he would like to prepare for their first meal together, and he would need to pick up supplies as soon as Will said yes.

~*~*~

“So. Tell me all about your hot date with the great Doctor Lecter today.”

Beverly flopped down on the couch next to Will, handing him a bottle of beer and grabbing herself a slice of pizza from the box on the coffee table.

“Not a date, Beverly. I'm sort of required to show our biggest source of income the place that he's paying for.”

“That's total bullshit and you know it, Graham. I saw the way he was looking at you. And how close you were together! You could barely fit a piece of paper in between you two.”

Will tried to scowl but couldn't. He'd had fun today, despite his expectations. It seemed that the more he and Hannibal spent time together, the more they talked, the more comfortable he grew. It seemed like finding out who he was should have intimidated him at the very least, but it had the opposite effect. Just thinking about the afternoon set the butterflies in his stomach into a riot, and he couldn't stop the grin from forcing its way onto his face.

“That good, huh?” Bev said with a smirk.

“Okay, fine, it was fun. I did have a good time. He's a lot more interesting than I had given him credit for.”

“He certainly doesn't seem to have underestimated how interesting he finds you.”

Will gave her a shove with his elbow, but didn't argue with her. He couldn't deny now that Hannibal was definitely showing interest in him. Not that he really could before, not with the way the man had been behaving, but there was even less deniability now. And Will liked it. He really did. And he liked *Hannibal.* The truth was, if Hannibal did ask him on a date, he was sure he'd say yes.

He didn't mean to, but a giggle burst out of him and he hurriedly tried to cover it up by shoving his beer in his mouth and taking a few swallows. Beverly was far too quick for that to fool her though, and he ignored her incredulous look.

“Did you just *giggle*?”

“Absolutely not. I'm closer to forty than I would like to admit, and I definitely do *not* giggle.”

“You giggled!”

Beverly began laughing, an almost uncontrollable sound and when she started snorting Will couldn't help but join her. Her laugh was infectious, to say the least.

“Oh my *god* Will, you really are in deep, aren't you?' Bev finally managed to force out as their laughter subsided.

“No,” he began, then held up a hand as Bev opened her mouth to retort. “I'm not in deep, but...I think I will be, if I'm not careful.”

Beverly's face softened, and Will could practically see her wanting to start cooing. To her credit she didn't, but Will still looked away anyway, suddenly embarrassed with how open he was being.

“So does this mean you've finally moved on?”

Will looked at her, confused for a moment, before realising she was talking about his divorce. About Molly. And that told him all he needed to know about how much he had moved on.

“Yeah. Yeah, I have. I mean, I'll always be sad that it didn't work out, but it was no one's fault, and now...”

He trailed off, not wanting to let Beverly know that he had had a momentary flash of being with Hannibal for more than just walks around his work.

It was definitely too soon to be thinking about that, especially since they hadn't even had anything resembling a proper date – or even any explicit confirmation that either of them felt anything for the other beyond the platonic – but it still felt comfortable. Safe.

Like home.

Will drained the rest of his beer, unsure he wanted to go any further along that particular train of thought. Beverly followed suit then stood, stretching her arms above her.

“I think this calls for another round, don't you?” she said, and walked back into the kitchen to grab another couple of bottles. Will grabbed himself another piece of pizza, chewing it slowly while he thought about the day. It had been so far above his expectations, and he found himself unexpectedly impatient to see Hannibal again. Even if it was just his by now customary visit to the greenhouse, little more than glimpses stolen and nods as they passed one another. It felt like his whole body was gently but firmly being tugged in Hannibal's direction, and the more he thought about the other man, the stronger that feeling became. He wondered if it was too early to call him. Hannibal had left the request to help hang his plants open, without pressuring Will in any fashion, and Will realised it was the perfect excuse to call. It wouldn't do to leave the man with ferns just lying around his house.

Beverly re-entered the room, dropping back down next to Will as he fished in his pockets for his phone. As soon as he grabbed it, it beeped, and he sighed in frustration. He was going to ignore whoever it was and make his excuses to Beverly so he could duck out of the apartment for a minute to make the call before his courage failed, when he saw that the message was from the very man he was thinking about. Anticipation surged through him and he grinned in delight, opening the message.

(7.34pm) Will, I want to thank you for taking the time from your day to show me around. It was a delightful afternoon, if I may say so. I wonder if I may impose on you further, and ask if you were still free to help hang my ferns? I would be most happy to cook you dinner in return. Hannibal.

Impossibly, Will's grin grew even wider, and he suddenly was filled with overflowing nervous energy. He stood, reading and re-reading the text, searching for any deeper hints as to Hannibal's intentions, but he kept getting stuck on the part where Hannibal was offering to cook him dinner.

“Will!”

Beverly's voice finally got through to him and he looked up to see her questioning look.

“What's going on?”

“Oh! Uh. Hannibal texted.”

“And?”

“And he's just saying thank you for the tour today. Um. And asking if I can come help him hang his ferns. And cook me dinner.”

“He *what?*” Bev exclaimed. “When? You're going to say yes, right? Wait, he needs help hanging his ferns? You only sold him tiny little ones, didn't you?”

Will nodded, and Bev howled with laughter again.

“That is hands down the worst excuse I have ever heard to get someone around to their house. Unless he's completely hopeless at manual labour.”

“He said he used to be a surgeon, so I'm guessing he's good with his hands.”

“Oh, I bet he is,” Bev replied with a smirk, causing Will to immediately wish the ground would open up and swallow him. When it rather predictably failed to do so, he instead chose to ignore that comment and sat back down, trying to work out how best to respond. He continued to ignore Beverly's helpful suggestions, which grew more and more lewd as she tried to get a reaction out of him, and instead focussed on typing out his response.

(7.39pm) Sure, no problem. I'm free tomorrow evening, if that's not too soon? Do I need to bring anything?

He hit send before he could second guess himself, deciding that keeping it fairly generic would be safest for now. He tapped his fingers restlessly, snagging the last piece of pizza in retaliation for Beverly's supposed sense of humour. His phone beeped again and he snatched it up, not caring about showing off his eagerness.

(7.41pm) Tomorrow suits me well. No need to bring anything other than your appetites. I look forward to seeing you again, Will. Sleep well tonight.

“Did. Did he say *appetites?* Like, with an s?” Bev said, reading over Will's shoulder. He could feel the blood flooding his face, skin doubtless as red as it had ever been and he pulled the phone close to his chest, switching the screen off as he did.

“It must have been a typo,” he said, his heart hammering because he knew, just *knew*, that Hannibal was the type of person to never send anything he didn't mean and would obsessively check over each message before sending it to make sure no typo made it through.

“Someone's getting laid tomorrow night.”

“No one is getting laid tomorrow night,” he said, but couldn't manage his normal level of argumentative heat. Beverly was right about Hannibal's intentions; he could feel it.

“I should probably head home now. Might be a long day tomorrow.”

He stood, somewhat in a daze, collecting his things Bev helped, walking to the door with him.

“Hey, you'll be fine,” she said softly, with a rub of his arm. “You're a great guy, he seems like a great guy...just relax, and you'll be fine.”

Will smiled, his excitement levels beginning to rise in spite of himself.

She was right, it would be fine. He couldn't wait.

Chapter End Notes

Oh hey, they're finally starting to get somewhere. Next chapter: THE DATE

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

The date

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will wasn't nervous.

He *wasn't*.

Just because Beverly said something didn't make it true. Yes, okay, his hands *were* a little on the shaky side while he tried to do up his tie, and so he needed Beverly to do it for him. And yes, he had come to work prepared so that he would actually have a chance of turning up at a reasonable time, and had demanded to be allowed to get ready at Beverly's. And was now pacing backwards and forwards in front of her couch and rubbing his (definitely *not* sweaty) palms on his thighs and trying to calm his thumping heart while Bev sat back with her feet up on the coffee table.

“Will, just breath. I know it's been a while, but dating isn't hard. Just talk to him like you have been, and only do what you're comfortable with.”

“It's different now. I feel more awkward than before. And why am I wearing a tie?”

“I don't know, you're the one who made me help you put it on!”

Will started tugging on it, loosening it off before sliding it out from around his neck and dropping it on the coffee table.

“It's too much. I can't hang plants with a tie on. And it's not like we're going out anywhere. We'll just be at his house. Oh god, we're already going to be at his *house*.”

Beverly looked nothing but sympathetic, which did nothing at all to help Will calm down. If anything, it was quite the opposite. He ran a hand through his hair and immediately cursed when his carefully tamed curls took the opportunity to free themselves from where he'd forced them to lie flat. He had no idea what he was doing. None at all. He hadn't even really dated Molly, not as such. They'd met through friends, gone out in group situations a bunch of times, and found themselves living together in a very short space of time. He wondered how one even went about dating someone like Hannibal Lecter, when a very unwelcome thought crossed his mind.

“What if this isn't even a date?”

He stared at Beverly, thin tendrils of panic threatening to very quickly become full fledged monsters beating down his chest.

“Have I misread him? He didn't even say it was a date. What if this isn't a date?”

“Will,” Beverly said firmly, standing and taking his shoulders in her hands. She looked him unwaveringly in the eyes, not allowing him to flinch away. “This is a date. There is no universe in which someone looks at you the way Hannibal does, draws pictures of you because he finds you so attractive, and comes up with the weakest excuse *ever* to get you over so he can cook dinner for you like he did, *without* it being a date.”

Will stilled, thinking it over. Beverly was right, of course. Will didn't tend to misread people like that; his skill at empathising with people, a skill he tried to keep under wraps as much as possible, didn't allow him to. That didn't stop his brain from trying to undermine what he knew to be true, and he wasn't entirely sure if *knowing* what this was made it easier, or harder.

“And don't forget, he wants you to bring more than one appetite.”

“Don't, Bev,” he groaned, scrubbing one hand over his face. Bev let him go to resume his pacing, watching him with now undisguised concern.

“Are you going to be ok, Will? You know it's not too late to back out.”

He stopped, taking a deep breath and letting it wash through him. He straightened up.

“Yeah. I'm just working all my nerves out now, with you, so that *hopefully* by the time I get to Hannibal's I'll be fine. And see?” He held out his hand, noticeably steadier than it had been just a few minutes earlier. “It's already working.”

“You're an odd duck sometimes, you know that, Will?”

Will smiled, thankful that he had someone like Beverly around to help him out when he needed it.

“And you're the best, Bev. I don't say it enough, but you are.”

Will grew serious, wanting Beverly to know just how much he did appreciate having her around.

“Aww, come here you.”

Bev pulled him into a tight hug, before giving him a playful shove away again.

“You should get going if you don't want to be late. Do you know where you're going?”

“Yeah, he texted me his address this morning. I've checked and double checked. And then checked a few more times.”

Will picked the tie back up, still unsure about whether to wear it or not.

“Give me the tie, Will. You can leave it here and save yourself the agony of putting it on and taking it off again the entire time you're supposed to be going into Hannibal's house.”

Will handed it over reluctantly. Bev was right, of course. That's exactly what he would have done. He undid the top button of his shirt, feeling much happier without the restrictive tightness of the buttoned collar. He opened the door, finally leaving.

“You don't need it, but good luck, Will. And I want to hear every single detail from you tomorrow, okay?”

“Okay,” Will nodded, knowing full well that no matter what, there would be some details he would keep to himself. He needed *some* memories that were just his, even if the evening turned out to be a disaster. He somehow felt that it wouldn't be, though.

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Hannibal had finished his preparations for dinner – had in fact finished them hours before, but couldn't keep himself from adjusting things until he felt they were perfect – and had found himself at something of a loose end. The food was not going to take long to cook, so he couldn't keep himself busy with that, not now that it was marinating in the fridge. He knew that Will would have finished work already, but waiting for him to arrive seemed to have caused the clock to slow to a virtual halt.

He used the time to get himself ready for Will's arrival, changing into his favourite suit, and wondered idly what Will would be wearing. He didn't think it would be the suit he had worn at the auction, but thought he would no doubt dress up a little. He smiled, thinking back on the way Will had looked that night. It still took his breath away, even in memory. But as beautiful as Will was – and he was the most beautiful thing Hannibal had ever laid eyes on – what was drawing Hannibal irretrievably closer to Will was that fascinating mind. He had never, and suspected never would again, met its like. Even just the few true meetings they had had so far had cemented that fact for Hannibal.

He returned downstairs, glancing out of the window as he walked, and the sight of Will's car pulling up to the curb caused him to involuntarily suck in a breath. He quickly touched his hair, making sure it was still in place, then wondered if he should open the door to wait for Will, or pretend that he hadn't noticed him arrive and wait for the doorbell to ring.

He decided on the latter, and retreated back to the kitchen, infuriated with himself. He had never before in his life been reduced to this, and the part that maddened him the most was that *he was enjoying it.* This state of flighty, nervous excitement, and the man who was causing it, had both become addictive, and it wasn't going to take long until there was nothing he could do about it. He may have reached that stage already.

After an interminably long time, during which Hannibal became convinced that he'd either hallucinated Will's car arriving or that Will had changed his mind and gone back home, the doorbell rang. Hannibal prepared himself, adjusting his suit jacket and taking a breath, then made his way to the door.

“Hello, Will.”

“Hello, Doctor Lecter,” Will paused for a moment, took a breath. “*Hannibal,*” he corrected himself, looking first down at the floor and then up at Hannibal through his eyelashes.

Hannibal stood and gazed at Will for a brief moment. The man had somehow managed to surpass his expectations, both in his appearance and his behaviour. He stood on the step, all open posture but appealingly shy nonetheless. His dark trousers perfectly set off the blue of the shirt that wasn't quite hidden beneath his coat, the top two buttons left undone, giving Hannibal an altogether too tempting hint of Will's fine collarbones. Hannibal drank in the sight then moved to the side, holding an arm out to guide Will into his home.

“Please, come in.”

Hannibal took Will's coat, hanging it up for him, and lead him into the house. He could sense Will's nervousness; he was torn between wanting to comfort him, and wanting to savour it while it lasted.

“How are you, Will?” he asked with a warm smile, the former winning out. The choice was confirmed as the correct one for him when Will immediately relaxed, his shyness dropping off him slowly to be replaced with an easy grin.

“I'm fine, now that I'm here,” he answered, that lovely pink blush spotting his cheeks once more. “I have to admit I'd gotten a bit nervous before I got here. More nervous before you answered the door.”

“And may I ask what made you so nervous?” Hannibal couldn't resist, but Will didn't seem to find anything wrong with the question.

“If I'm being honest, I wasn't sure whether this was just a friendly visit, or...or...”

He trailed off, and Hannibal supplied the rest of the sentence.

“Or a date?” he asked, unable to keep his eyes from drinking in the way the flush on Will's face deepened to a warmer red. Will just nodded, his eyes quickly skittering away before he squared his shoulders and met Hannibal's gaze.

“I would like this to be a date, if you are okay with that,” Hannibal said softly, meaning every word of it. He wanted Will. Even if they had only known each other a short time, he wanted Will more than he could recall ever wanting anyone; but more than that, he wanted Will to want him of his own accord. Warmth suffused him when Will's smile returned, bigger than Hannibal could recall ever having seen it before.

“With that cleared up,” he continued, “I would feel terribly rude asking you to work for your supper, so please don't feel that you have to help with the ferns.”

“No, I don't mind at all. I was prepared to do that, so it wouldn't feel right to not actually do it. Especially since you've gone to the trouble of cooking dinner.”

“It wouldn't be a proper date without dinner,” Hannibal teased. “But if you are so set on working even here, then maybe we had better get started.”

He lead Will to the dining room, enjoying the gasp that came from the other man when he saw the room for the first time. The huge herb garden on the wall did tend to have the effect, which if Hannibal was being honest with himself – and he always was – had been put in with the overriding purpose of gaining a reaction from people. It rarely disappointed.

“I'm beginning to suspect you lied to get me here, Doctor Lecter.”

Will was amazed at the size of the garden he saw before him. He'd never seen anything quite like it in someone's home before. He'd been surprised enough at the ostentation of the house itself, but the garden was something else entirely. It captured his attention, that was for sure. The last remaining threads of nervousness left him as he looked closely, pleased to see that all the plants looked well cared for, lush and strong.

“I may have neglected to mention that I have some small experience in looking after plants, but I don't believe I lied.”

Hannibal sounded amused, and Will turned to him with a smile.

“You continue to surprise me, Hannibal.”

Hannibal looked pleased, and gestured to the wall above the garden.

“I had thought to hang them up there. The light is adequate, but not direct, and they would perfectly complement the rest of the garden. What do you think?”

Will had to agree with Hannibal's assessment. It did look to be the perfect place. So decided, Hannibal went to get a step ladder and the ferns, and Will took his time looking over the herbs. There seemed to be every variety of herb any home cook could want, and then more for a more accomplished chef.

Hannibal re-entered the room with the step ladder and small toolbox as Will was leaning forward to smell the basil. He straightened back up, slightly embarrassed.

“So how do you want to do this?” he asked, before taking a closer look at what Hannibal was wearing. It didn't seem that his customary three-piece suit was the most practical clothing for clambering up a ladder and screwing hooks into the wall, and he said as much.

“You'd be surprised what can be accomplished in well fitted clothes,” Hannibal said, but stepped aside. It was only once he was perched atop the ladder, adjusting where to put the hooks, that he became aware of how much he was having to lean, of how much his ass was being forced to stick out. And of how distracted Hannibal was sounding every time Will asked him to give his input into how the mount was looking. It suddenly didn't seem the best choice of words, given their respective positions, and it felt like his face had burst into flame once he realised what was going on. He hurriedly hung the ferns, swaying a little as he made his way back down, only to be steadied by a warm, broad hand in the middle of his back.

He paused for a moment, eyes closed, relishing the contact, before moving the rest of the way down. Hannibal didn't move from where he was, nor did he remove his hand from Will's back. Will slowly turned to face Hannibal.

“I hope that meets with your approval,” he all but whispered, intently aware of the way Hannibal's hand had slipped down to his waist where it continued to steady him.

“A fine job, indeed,” Hannibal replied, his free hand reaching up to brush an errant curl back from Will's forehead. He didn't look away from Will once, not even to give the ferns a final inspection. Instead, their eyes strayed over each other's faces, flicking from eyes, across cheekbones, down to lips and back again. Will watched, transfixed, when Hannibal sucked in his bottom lip, Will's tongue darting out to lick his own in response. The energy surging between them finally broke through the final barriers with that movement and Hannibal leaned forward, kissing the spot Will's tongue had marked for him, softly, almost chastely. Will finally moved again, lifting his arms to Hannibal's hips, the two men pulling each other closer. Hannibal cupped Will's head, fingers threading back through his hair as he kissed him again, a little harder this time, Will returning the kiss this time. Their foreheads touched as their lips broke apart, noses nuzzling one another. They stood together like that in silence, neither man willing to be the one to move away, to break this moment.

“I'm afraid I must go and start cooking, as loathe as I am to end this,” murmured Hannibal, making no move to do anything of the sort.

“I suppose I should let you go then,” Will whispered back, his fingers involuntarily tightening on Hannibal's hips at the mere thought of having to release him.

Hannibal huffed a smile, kissing Will once, twice, three more times before lifting his head to rest his cheek on the side of Will's head. The scent of the man was dizzying, and Will breathed in deeply, savouring the aroma of the cologne and the smell of the man himself beneath that. He was dimly aware of the way Hannibal was doing the same, and he suppressed a chuckle. Eventually though, Hannibal straightened back up, pressing one last kiss to Will's forehead and lifting his hands to run down Will's arms.

“Please, follow me.”

Will followed Hannibal into a living room, still feeling slightly giddy and off-balance. Hannibal sat him down in an armchair and left, returning a minute later with a tumbler of whiskey.

“This meal will not take long to cook, but I must ask you to wait here for me,” Hannibal looked down fondly at Will as he spoke, but Will immediately felt guilty.

“Are you sure there's nothing I can do to help?”

“Not at all. I have gone with a simple dish tonight, but maybe, if you would like to come back again, we can prepare something together?”

Hannibal sounded confident, but Will was very aware of the thread of uncertainty underpinning the statement. It made him feel good, knowing that Hannibal very much did want more, but was second-guessing himself and was not willing to pressure Will in anyway.

“I'm looking forward to it already,” he said, taking a sip from his drink in what he hoped was a seductive manner. The flash of heat in Hannibal's eyes told him he succeeded. Hannibal

gave another one of those small smiles that was more in his eyes than his lips, then nodded and withdrew from the room, leaving Will alone.

It didn't take long until he could hear the sound of sizzling coming from the kitchen, and the smell of something divine followed not too long after. Whatever it was, it was already several steps up on the pizza he and Bev had shared last night.

He brushed his fingers to his lips, still tingling as they were from the kiss. It was so soft, so *innocent*, yet it held the promise of so much more. He couldn't stop the laughter that bubbled up, unable to remember when he'd felt quite this way before. He was happy, and content, and apprehensive but also filled with anticipation, and affection. More, *much* more than just simple affection. He replayed the kiss over and over, grinning to himself the whole while. It was something of a shock when Hannibal returned.

“Will? Dinner is served.”

Will glanced up at the clock, surprised to find so much time had passed. He stood, leaving his glass where it sat, untouched but for the sip he had had earlier. As they approached the dining room the smell grew stronger and his mouth began watering. They sat at one end of the long dining table, slices of meat intermingling with chopped vegetables in a riot of colour.

“Tonight we are having grilled venison heart, with peppers and onions.”

Will raised an eyebrow, intrigued.

“I've never had heart before.”

“It is a much underutilised organ. And one good sized deer heart is the perfect size for two people.”

Will again picked up on the apprehension underlying Hannibal's words, and couldn't help but be very aware of what this meal symbolised.

One heart, between two people.

Instead of answering, Will picked up his fork and took a slice of meat, carefully placing it between his lips then biting down. The flavours were unexpected, the marinade elevating the taste of the heart itself. He hummed in surprise.

“This is delicious,” he said, noting the way Hannibal had watched every last movement. He smiled, and Will smiled in return, the two of them continuing to sneak looks at each other as they ate. Before too long they had finished their meals, and Will stood to clear his plate. Hannibal stopped him, as Will had rather suspected he would.

“Allow me. Dessert should be ready now, if you would like some?”

“The dinner was perfect, but I'm looking forward to seeing what you will manage with dessert. I hadn't expected you to be such a chef.”

Will knew Hannibal would pick up on the hidden meaning in his statement, an acknowledgement, acceptance and gratitude for the gift Hannibal had offered. Hannibal nodded graciously and collected the plates, Will sitting again as he did so.

In a few short moments, Hannibal returned with their dessert.

“Dobos torte, served with a fresh raspberry sauce.”

He placed a slice of cake in front of Will, and he marvelled at the intricate layering. He glanced up in wonder at Hannibal as the other man took his seat.

“Did you make this as well?”

“Of course. I told you I would cook you dinner. That means everything.”

“You're amazing.”

He took a forkful of the cake, amazed at the way it seemed to almost melt in his mouth, the flavours flowing through his mouth and over his tongue. It took him until he was halfway through it to notice that Hannibal had yet to touch his own. Instead, Hannibal was watching Will eat, undisguised longing on his face.

“You are really quite exquisite,” Hannibal murmured when he realised he'd been caught staring.

Carefully, Will put his fork down and stood, walking slowly to Hannibal's chair. He leaned down, grabbing the back of Hannibal's head, pulling their faces closer together.

“Not nearly as much as you are,” he whispered, then closed the distance to press their lips together again.

Chapter End Notes

So this turned out a bit longer than I had anticipated, but it was enormous fun writing! They are finally, *finally* getting somewhere ♥

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

The Date, part II

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal moaned softly as Will kissed him, his hands reaching up to grab Will's waist almost without his conscious control. He couldn't believe how *good* the other man tasted. It was beyond anything he could have ever imagined, and he found himself straining forward to chase more, more, *more* of whatever it was about Will that made him so addictive. Hungrily he pulled at Will until he was straddling his legs, slowly but surely lowering his weight until he was sitting on Hannibal's lap. This kiss was different, *so* different from the first they had shared. That one was gentle and sweet. This one though...this one was anything but. It was heat, and want, and desperation, and Hannibal had no idea what had sparked it or why they were doing this. All he knew was that he needed more, and so more he took.

Will writhed on his lap, soft sounds coming from him as he grabbed at Hannibal, hands seemingly unable to remain still. Hannibal found himself in the same predicament, his hands roaming up Will's back to run through his hair, only to travel back down to his ass, around the front and up his chest then starting the journey all over again. There was no part of Will he didn't want to touch. The kiss was almost ferocious in its intensity, wet and lust driven and perfect. They only broke apart when Will forced his hips down, grinding against Hannibal's burgeoning erection.

They separated, each man breathless, jolted back to reality by the sudden sensation. Will rested his forehead on Hannibal's, while Hannibal clung to Will's waist. They sat, quietly panting, Will still rocking gently though seemingly unaware of it.

“That was...”

Hannibal waited for the rest of the sentence, but Will lapsed back into silence, his arms still wrapped around Hannibal's neck and his weight on his shoulders.

“That was,” Hannibal agreed, slowly regaining his breath.

Will sat up, allowing his arms to slide back until his hands were resting on Hannibal's shoulders. Hannibal looked up at him, amazed that this beautiful creature was here, now, like this.

“I'm sorry,” he said, blue eyes flitting around, looking everywhere but at Hannibal. “I don't know what came over me.”

“I don't know what came over you either,” Hannibal replied carefully. “But I am not in the least bit sorry for it.”

He tilted his head, placing a soft kiss on the back of Will's hand. He could feel Will's hand tighten reflexively, fingertips digging into Hannibal's skin oh so briefly. He relished the pressure. He looked back up into Will's eyes, committing the sight of that flushed face, those kiss-swollen lips to memory. Will's hair, so carefully styled when he had arrived was now in disarray, curls disrupted until they framed his face in soft, brown brush strokes. Hannibal knew, without any trace of doubt, that this was an image he was going to be drawing the moment he was alone. Maybe before, if he thought Will would be amenable.

He began tracing small circles with his thumbs onto Will's sides, enjoying the minute shiver the action produced, even through Will's clothing. Will's eyes drifted shut as he lost himself to the sensation. It intrigued Hannibal, the sensitivity Will was clearly displaying. He wondered what other reactions he would be able to coax from this man's body.

“So many chairs around this table, and I'm here, sitting in your lap.”

“I would reduce them all to kindling, if it meant you would remain here one second longer.”

Will opened his eyes when Hannibal spoke, the flush across his cheeks deepening as the words settled in his mind. Every reaction of Will's, physical or verbal, was intoxicating to Hannibal. He drank them in, constantly probing for new tastes, greedy for all he could get. He gave a shiver of his own, barely suppressed, when Will cupped his hands and ran them up Hannibal's neck, onto his cheeks, then pushing them backwards and through Hannibal's hair.

“I think I could get used to this,” Will said, his voice so low Hannibal had to strain to hear it.

“As could I.”

“If someone had told me when we first met that we would end up here, I wouldn't have believed them.”

Hannibal didn't respond to that, letting his lack of words coax more out of Will. It didn't take long.

“You've managed to change my mind about you in every conceivable way, and I don't even know how you did it.”

Will gazed at Hannibal fondly as he spoke, the fingers still resting at the back of his head idly scratching back and forth. Hannibal turned his head into it, with a sudden surge of understanding for the way house pets always craved this kind of touch. He reached up with one hand to hold the side of Will's face, a half mirror of Will's own position.

“Why venison?”

Hannibal blinked at the sudden subject change, momentarily thrown.

“Sorry,” Will said, his head ducking in shyness. “I was wondering before, and I forgot to ask, and...”

Hannibal smiled. He knew Will understood the heart, just as he knew Will would not have been put off by it – on either of its levels. He had assumed he had made the venison connection as well. He looked down, bringing his hand back down to Will's waist, watching his own hands as he spoke.

“It matched the staghorn ferns. It seemed appropriate.”

“Deer have a lot of powerful symbolism attached to them.”

“Deer in general, and stags in particular.”

“Strength.”

“Yes.”

“Love, and protection,” Will offered, his voice subdued, though whether in apprehension or something else Hannibal could not tell.

“I would offer you both, if you would have them,” he said, still unwilling to look up. He didn't know what he was doing. He'd never had such need for someone, had never felt this drive to give himself to another person. But he knew Will, more than anyone else, could understand him, accept him.

Will's hands slipped down again, grabbing the sides of Hannibal's face and tilting it up. He said nothing, just waited until Hannibal's eyes met his own, then leaned forward, their noses nuzzling together again before he kissed Hannibal, softly, gently, slowly.

Hannibal smiled again as the kiss ended, his skin rubbing against Will's stubble. Yes, these reactions were *all* divine.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this chapter is so short, it was a real struggle for some reason. Should be back to normal by the Friday chapter :D

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Bev gets the details, and Hannibal takes Will out to lunch.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will had barely entered his office, was in fact still taking his coat off, when Beverly burst into the room, slamming the door shut behind her. He knew exactly what was coming when she sat herself down in one of the chairs, watching him expectantly, and so he took his time hanging the coat and getting himself organised. He sat at his desk, shuffling papers and refusing to acknowledge her, waiting instead for her to lose her patience and just ask him. It didn't take long.

“Come on, spill Graham. I want to hear every detail. Well, maybe not *every* detail. Are there details I don't want to hear?”

Will looked at her levelly, but couldn't stop the smile that was forcing its way onto his face. He looked away again, but it was already all the encouragement Beverly needed.

“*No way.* You go, Will! I really didn't think you had it in you! Unless Doctor Lecter is the one who had it in him...”

“*Jesus,* Beverly!”

“I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I couldn't resist. Hey, are you ok?”

Will was coughing uncontrollably, choking on the air he had sucked in at Bev's words. He grabbed the bottle of water he always kept on his desk, drinking it back and trying to get himself settled again. Bev watched, only mild contrition on her face.

“I'm sorry,” she said, actually sounding like she meant it for once. “That was inappropriate. But does your reaction mean there *was* something that went on?”

It was obviously too much for Will to ask, that she was just drop it. To tell the truth though, he didn't really *want* her to drop it. He was filled with so much energy, and he wanted to tell whoever would listen about it. If Bev was the one stupid enough to open herself up for it, then so be it.

“No, no. Nothing like that.”

“But?”

“But?”

“There's a but there, Will. I can see it. So spill. I know you want to, it's all over your face.”

“You were right. It was definitely a date. And he is *definitely* interested.”

“And what about you?” Bev's face had lit up with genuine happiness for Will, and he was once again struck by how lucky he was to have her for a friend. “Are you definitely interested?”

“Yeah. I am,” he said simply.

“Tell me everything.”

Will gave her a basic run down of the night, glossing over the second kiss. He did *not* tell her about the goodbye kiss, the way Hannibal had ended up pushing him into the wall next to the open front door with no care at all for who might be looking, the way Will had been unable to resist shoving his hands under Hannibal's shirt so he could run his fingers directly over warm skin. The way Hannibal's leg had slotted between Will's own, and how he wouldn't have cared if Hannibal had taken him right there in full view of the street. It was only Hannibal's self control, clearly stretched to its very limits, that had enabled Will to leave without that happening. The last image he had of Hannibal before driving away was seeing the man in his door, suit jacket rumpled and shirt untucked, normally immaculate hair a dishevelled mess. And he *certainly* was not going to tell her what he did the second he got his own front door shut behind him. He was half ashamed and half thrilled that he hadn't even been able to hold off grabbing himself until he reached the bathroom, instead immediately turning and leaning against the closed door. He deliberately did not imagine whether Hannibal had done the same.

Just thinking about it all now was causing the heat to rise again, and he took another swig from his water bottle and tried desperately to think of something, *anything* else.

“So you're going to see him again, right?”

Will grinned and nodded.

“It's Saturday tomorrow, so I'll be going over to his house again. Earlier this time, so we can cook together.”

“Wow, that's more domestic that I expected from you.”

He shrugged, still losing the battle against the smile that refused to leave his face.

“If last night is anything to go by, he's an amazing chef. He cooked us venison heart and it was amazing. I've never had anything like it.”

Beverly raised an eyebrow, looking impressed.

“You have no idea how good it is to see you looking this happy again, Will,” she said softly. “In fact, I don't think I've ever seen you like this. He's clearly good for you.”

“It's still early days, Bev. And I wasn't looking for someone like him. But...I have a good feeling about this. We just click, for some reason. I don't ever feel any of that awkwardness around him that I do around everyone else.”

Bev just watched him fondly, as Will blushed and ducked his head. He was saved from feeling the need to explain further by his phone beeping, and he grabbed it hurriedly, if for no other reason than to have something to do with his hands. A wave of giddiness washed over him when he saw Hannibal's name flash up on the display.

(8.24am) Good morning, Will. I would like to take you out to lunch today, if you are free.

“He wants to take me out to lunch today,” he blurted out, before Beverly had a chance to quiz him about it.

“You're abandoning me already? I am mortally wounded, Graham.”

“Who says I'm going to say yes?”

“Oh please, you're practically vibrating out of your seat with excitement. Of course you're going. If you tried to say no, I'd probably tie you up and put you in his car myself, anyway.”

“You're the best, you know that?” he said as he fired off a quick reply.

“I did know that, actually,” Bev answered as she stood. “I'd better get back to work, but I want you to check in with me as soon as you get back, you hear me?”

“You're far too invested in my love life, Bev."

“Have to be invested in someone's, my friend.”

Bev leaned over and gave Will a quick kiss on the top of his head, then left the office. He sat in the quiet, waiting for Hannibal's reply and wondering how on earth he was supposed to get any work done until he saw him again.

~*~*~

Despite himself, Will had found himself completely caught up in his work, to the point that he somehow managed to lose track of time. He was emerging from the ferns, back onto the path, when he saw Hannibal. He was standing, holding his coat with hands clasped in front of him, a half hidden smile on his face as he watched Will, and Will felt his breath catch. He had never seen anyone, anything, as beautiful as the sight before him now. Slowly he approached him, dusting his hands off self-consciously.

“Hi,” he said, butterflies rioting in his stomach.

“Hello, Will,” Hannibal greeted him with a smile. He held out one arm, gesturing along the path. “Shall we?”

“Just let me get my stuff and clean up, then I'm all yours.”

Hannibal's smile grew, and he inclined his head in acknowledgement. They strode along the path, arms brushing as they swayed closer to each other. It was nice, Will thought, relaxing more and more with each step, even though they had yet to exchange any further words. They reached his office and he went in to wash his hands in the little corner sink, Hannibal entering behind him and closing the door. Will couldn't help but smile at the way Hannibal stood primly in the middle of the small space, taking care not to disrupt anything. He dried off, turned to dig his wallet and keys from out of his bag, then straightened to find Hannibal standing right over him. His only choices were to step back, or brush his whole body up against the doctor. It was no choice at all. He drew himself up to his full height, meeting Hannibal's eyes, and pressed himself just a little bit closer. Neither of them spoke. Hannibal reached up to brush a few strands of hair behind Will's ear, his fingers curving and trailing across Will's skin as he did so. Will shivered, his eyes drifting shut, his hands lifting to rest on Hannibal's hips.

“Hey Will, when are you – oh! Hello, Doctor Lecter.”

Matthew Brown was rarely one of Will's favourite people, but he had never disliked the sight of him as much as he did now. He was standing in the doorway, a look of mixed interest and disgust on his face as his eyes bored into the back of Hannibal's head. Will opened his mouth to speak, then cleared his throat so his voice would actually emerge.

“What is it, Matthew?” he said as he took half a step back, hands falling back to his sides as he did. He didn't miss the flash of irritation in Hannibal's eyes, though he knew it wasn't aimed at him. They were mirroring each other all too well in their reactions to Matthew's interruption.

“I just wanted to check on when you wanted help on that transplanting project.”

Will's temper seethed.

“We're not starting that until next week. Just like we discussed at the meeting yesterday.”

“Right, right. My bad.”

Hannibal turned, facing Matthew, and Will could *feel* the energy rolling off the two of them in waves as they stared at each other. The tension in Hannibal was growing more noticeable the longer Matthew stayed standing there, seemingly with no intention to leave as long as the other two remained.

“Is there anything else, Matthew?” Will asked, sure the situation was in very real danger of boiling over if he didn't intervene.

“No,” Matthew finally answered. “Don't let me keep you.”

He still made no move to leave, but Will had had enough.

“Well, we're off now. So if you'll excuse us?”

Hannibal took Will's lead, following him out with a hand possessively on the small of Will's back. It wasn't lost on Will that the hand didn't move until they reached Hannibal's car, even long after Matthew was out of sight.

It didn't take long for them to pull up at the restaurant Hannibal had decided on for their lunch, Hannibal parking in a reserved space at the back of a covered carpark. They were quickly shown to their table, the staff apparently expecting Hannibal. This was more than Will had expected, but given that he was used to not much more than a sandwich in the lunch room, that wasn't really saying a great deal. They sat in quiet for a time, Will not entirely sure what he wanted to have.

“The fish here is very good, if you weren't sure what you might like.”

“That obvious, was it?” Will smiled. Hannibal smiled back for the first time since the frankly bizarre interaction with Matthew. It pleased Will, to see him lose the tension he had been carrying.

“Don't pay any attention to Matthew. He's an idiot, but he's harmless.”

“I've met people like Matthew before. They are rarely harmless.”

Will looked at Hannibal, unsure of what to make of his statement.

“I would only ask that you be careful, Will.”

Will just nodded, then returned his attention to the menu in front of him. He would be lying if he said he wasn't bothered by what had happened, but the fact was that all that they had done was look at each other.

Probably be best to make sure they don't cross paths any more than is necessary, Will thought. He was glad when the waiter arrived to take their orders, deciding eventually on the grilled salmon with chilli kelp. Hannibal opted for grilled saffron rack of lamb, and Will resolved to steal some from his plate while he wasn't looking.

They made small talk while they waited, something that Will was not used to finding so easy. Everything about Hannibal was easy. Silence, talk, all of it. And there was something about watching Hannibal eat. He took great pleasure in it, obviously savouring every smell and every taste that he took. It had never occurred to Will to think of the simple act of eating lunch as erotic, but Hannibal was fast bringing those associations to the act. Will flushed, thinking of how desperate he had been for release the entire way drive home the night before, and he was beginning to think he would be in for a very long afternoon at work if he had to spend much longer watching Hannibal, but not touching him.

“Something on your mind, Will?” Hannibal asked, a knowing smile in his eyes. Will realised he had been sitting with his fork half way to his mouth, just watching Hannibal. He had no idea how long he had been stuck like that, and humiliation flooded him. It was more than a shock though, when Hannibal's foot slowly began running up the inside of Will's lower leg, and the smirk the other man gave him when he nearly dropped his fork was...

God, he *wanted* Hannibal so much and it was all he could do to keep from grabbing the man's tie right then and there and haul him across the table. He swallowed as Hannibal's foot made its way higher, and he had to close his eyes to try and cling onto the tattered remnants of his self control.

“Hannibal,” he croaked, not caring how ruined his voice sounded. “This is going to end very badly if you keep this up.”

“Perhaps I will go and pay, and we can take this elsewhere?”

Will nodded quickly, swallowing again as Hannibal brushed past him on his way to pay. The sudden realisation that he was going to have to get back to work, and that there was no way there would be time to carry on had him gritting his teeth in a bid to damp down the raging fire burning inside him. He jumped when a hand rested on his shoulder.

“Come, Will.”

The combination of that choice of words, and the now husky quality of Hannibal's voice did nothing to help Will's situation, and he followed the man without question. They moved far more quickly towards the car than they had on their way from it, and the second the reached the secluded corner Hannibal had parked in, the man was on him, almost shoving Will against the car door in his hurry to claim and be claimed. Will kissed him back hungrily, not caring if they were seen but also glad the parking building was almost empty, and decidedly more shadowed in their far corner. Hannibal shoved a knee between Will's legs, deftly separating them, then prying at his belt with nimble fingers. Almost before Will knew what was happening those fingers were thrust inside his pants, wrapping around his cock and he bit back a moan, clinging desperately to Hannibal's shoulders as he worked him quickly. In his current state it didn't take long for Hannibal to bring him to completion and Will tensed up, spilling into Hannibal's hand. His head spun, and his knees were in very real danger of collapsing, so he just continued to cling to Hannibal as the other man kissed his way down Will's neck. Slowly, carefully he removed his hand from Will's pants, taking care to spill as little as possible. With his free hand he pulled out his pocket square and mopped up the mess in his palm, then slowly licked his fingers while staring straight into Will's eyes.

“Jesus,” Will breathed.

“We didn't have time for dessert,” Hannibal purred, mischievous amusement filling his eyes.

“*Fuck,*” Will moaned then, leaning his head back against the roof of the car. He had no idea *what* sort of man he had gotten himself involved with, but there was no way he was letting go of him.

Chapter End Notes

Surprise public handjobs! Isn't Hannibal nice.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal have their cooking date.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“So how was lunch?”

Bev stuck her head around the corner of Will's office as he was collecting his things to go home. He'd successfully managed to avoid both her and Matthew, but he knew he wasn't going to be allowed to leave this place without throwing her a couple of crumbs. Not that he needed any excuse to talk about Hannibal these days. No, he was more worried he would accidentally say too much, and the end of their date wasn't something that really needed sharing.

“It was good. Nice. We went to a restaurant, talked some, then came back.”

“Must have been some talk. Every time you've seen me you've gone red and run off,” she teased, leaning against the door frame and crossing her arms. And sure enough, the mere mention of it had Will's face heating back up and that traitorous grin forcing its way back.

“Please tell me you didn't have a quickie in the bathroom.”

“We did not have a quickie in the bathroom.”

“Good, because that's just rude, doing that in a public place,” she said with a sly smile.

Will averted his eyes, intensely aware that what they had done was *far* more public than that. And god if that wasn't turning him on even more, just thinking about it. He coughed, conscious of the fact that it just made it more obvious that he was trying to hide something, but he used it to change the subject anyway.

“Hey, have you noticed Matthew being weirder than usual? He barged in here just as Hannibal and I were getting ready to leave, and ... I dunno. He was strange. Just stood there staring at Hannibal. Wouldn't get out of the way. It was uncomfortable.”

The more he thought about it, the stranger it all seemed. And he wasn't sure that Hannibal wasn't right about needing to keep an eye on Matthew. But he knew that getting Beverly to help him would make things far easier.

“I'll keep a watch for you. That is weird. Why was he even in here?”

“He said he wanted to ask about the transplant project next week, but we've already discussed that. It was a lie. And I don't know if it was me, or Hannibal that he was more interested in intercepting.”

“Probably both, if it's a case of jealousy.”

Will frowned, troubled. He wanted to believe that it wasn't that, but he knew that it was. He sighed, hoping that Hannibal's worries would come to nothing and the whole situation would blow over. He walked out to his car with Beverly, the conversation moving on to other topics, then drove home. He wanted to relax as much as possible before his date with Hannibal the following night. He suspected it was going to be a late one.

~*~*~

4.30pm found Will making his way to Hannibal's front door, tightly clutching the bottle of Bordeaux Hannibal had requested. He had gone for the top shelf bottle, or as near to it as he could afford, feeling quite certain that Hannibal would probably not appreciate the quality of wine that Will himself would normally have bought. If Will had ever been in the mood to buy himself a bottle of wine at all, that was. He rang the doorbell and waited for Hannibal to arrive, not nearly as nervous as he had thought he might be. He was fairly sure what was going to happen at some point tonight – had even made sure he was prepared and slid a condom or two into his back pocket – but the expected nervousness had given way to anticipation. It had been too long. He smiled as the door opened, Hannibal gazing down at him warmly.

“Welcome, Will. Please, come in.”

Hannibal stepped back to allow Will room to move in, but remained in the doorway enough that Will had to brush past him. The contact produced a shiver in Will, running the length of his spine. He stopped to remove his coat, and was only vaguely surprised when Hannibal stepped up behind him, helping him draw the garment down. He leaned forward as he did so, burying his nose in Will's hair, Will leaning back into the touch and allowing his eyes to half shut.

“I have missed this touch more than I should,” Hannibal murmured huskily into Will's ear as his arms snaked around Will's waist, the sound vibrating right through to his very core.

“Me too,” Will said. He lifted one arm to rest atop Hannibal's, the other still holding the wine bottle. His head dropped back against Hannibal's shoulder and the two of them stood in peaceful quiet for a moment or two longer, savouring each other's touch. Hannibal brushed his lips to Will's neck, barely a kiss but enough to cause goose bumps to break out across Will's skin, then straightened up, taking the bottle from Will's hand.

“This looks in danger of falling to the floor,” Hannibal said, his tone light and teasing. He was right, Will thought sheepishly. His grip had grown a lot looser as Hannibal had nuzzled at his throat, and if they had remained like that any longer there was little doubt that they would be surrounded by shards of glass and glistening splashes of wine. He kicked his shoes off, breathing deeply to pull his body back under control, and followed Hannibal into the house.

“What are the plans for dinner?” he asked as they walked. It was still early enough that he could smell no preparations being made, and *now* the nerves kicked in because while he was a more than adequate cook, he'd only really ever cooked for himself. Molly had taken care of the bulk of the cooking for them and her son, except when Will had been out fishing. He'd never cooked for an audience before, and he had no doubt that Hannibal saw this particular activity as a type of performance art. To say he was feeling intimidated would be an understatement.

“Roasted pheasant,” Hannibal answered over his shoulder setting the wine bottle down on the bench. “The trick to a good roast pheasant is to brine the bird first, allowing the meat to soak up the moisture and the salt.”

He gestured to a covered dish at the far end of the bench.

“I began this one before lunch, and it has been returning to room temperature now. The brine is made of not just salt water, but bay leaves, juniper berries and sugar, which will impart a subtle, yet distinct taste to the meat.”

Will watched as Hannibal moved around the kitchen, turning the oven on to preheat and pulling pans out of cupboards.

“We can stuff the bird with either onion or apple. Which would you prefer?”

Will blinked, suddenly feeling a bit out of his depth, and he hadn't even begun to actually help Hannibal yet.

“I've never had pheasant before. I don't know that I would have a preference for either.”

Hannibal obviously picked up on Will's discomfort, and rounded the island to where Will was standing hopelessly.

“We'll have apple, then,” he said, running a hand up Will's arm, his fingers lingering on Will's shoulder for a moment before he turned and strode to the fridge. Hannibal's touch left a tingling path along Will's skin. He couldn't recall ever meeting someone as tactile as Hannibal, no matter the relationship, but he found he liked it. A lot.

“So what can I do to help?” he finally asked, remembering that the whole idea of this was to have dinner be a joint effort.

“If you could get me some sage and thyme from the garden, I would be most grateful.”

That was something Will could manage without any trouble, and he walked to the herb garden, acutely aware of the look that followed him out of the room. If he swayed a bit more than he normally would, well it was no more than he could be expected to do. Not with knowing what effect he had on Hannibal, and not after the state they'd left each other in after lunch yesterday. As he picked the herbs he needed, he wondered what, if anything, Hannibal had done to alleviate the obvious situation he had still been sporting when he drove away after dropping Will back at work. He hurriedly gathered what he needed before that train of

thought could go any further, then closed his eyes and breathed deeply to compose himself. Again.

Once he was settled, he re-entered the kitchen, brandishing the herbs in front of him. Hannibal took them with a smile, then turned back to what he was doing. Will could see that in the time he was gone, Hannibal had already prepared and placed the apple, and now he carefully added the sage and thyme, discarding what he didn't need. He lifted a piece of twine, and Will watched in fascination as Hannibal trussed the pheasant. He made it look simple, despite the many twists and turns that the twine and bird alike took. He was done quickly, and had it placed in the roasting pan almost before Will knew it.

“Would you care to oil the skin?” Hannibal asked, and for all that his tone remained innocent enough, there was a dark gleam in his eyes that Will couldn't ignore. He moved closer, allowing Hannibal to guide his hands as they poured olive oil over the skin of the pheasant, their fingers twinning together as they moved slowly over the increasingly slippery skin. They spent far longer on this than Hannibal had spent on the trussing; far longer than they needed to at all, Will was sure. He didn't complain.

“I think that will do,” Hannibal said, moving half a step back but pulling Will with him, rather than letting go. He rested his head alongside Will's and breathed deeply, then stepped away properly. They washed their hands together, the citrus scented soap adding to the smell of the fresh herbs, then Hannibal put the pan into the oven before pulling a chilled bottle of wine from the fridge.

“Would you care to indulge in a glass while we wait for this first stage to be finished?”

“I would love to indulge,” Will said, not bothering to hide the undertones to his reply. Hannibal merely raised an eyebrow, then moved to get two wine glasses. He opened the bottle and poured something white and bubbly, handing one to Will. They stood facing each other, taking sips from their glasses.

“What now?”

“Now we wait for the skin to sear, then reduce the heat. The vegetables are ready to go, and will not take long. Keeping ourselves occupied for the main cooking time shouldn't be too hard, I suspect.”

“I suspect not,” Will replied, raising his glass to his mouth again. He paid close attention to the way Hannibal's eyes tracked the movement, lingering as Will's tongue chased a drop of the wine across his lower lip. Will sucked his lower lip in, curious what Hannibal would do, and was rewarded with a widening of his eyes and quick gulp of his own drink. Will's mouth quirked up in a crooked smile. The look on Hannibal's face as he realised what Will was doing was worth every second, as was the half growl as Hannibal put his glass back onto the bench, taking Will's as he did so.

“I hadn't finished that,” he said, voice low. Hannibal didn't answer, instead drawing close and placing his hands on Will's chest. They slid slowly down, leaving it until they reached Will's belt to move sideways, coursing across his waist to rest just above his ass. He pulled them

together and Will let out an involuntary gasp when his by now very interested dick ground against Hannibal's.

“You're turning out to be a very wicked boy, aren't you?” whispered Hannibal, leaning in close enough for their noses to brush, their breath intermingling but their lips not touching. When Will moved his head forward to close the gap, Hannibal pulled back the same amount, maintaining the distance but refusing to let Will get any closer. In retaliation Will wrapped his own arms around Hannibal's waist and pushed his hips forward, thoroughly enjoying the half moan that slipped from between Hannibal's lips.

“Very wicked indeed,” Hannibal said, his breath hitching as Will began to slowly rotate his hips in small circles. Behind them the oven timer sounded, and Hannibal sighed in what sounded very much like frustration.

“Wait for me in the dining room,” he said, his tone firm and demanding and leaving no room for argument. Will loved it. He released Hannibal and moved to follow his instructions, but Hannibal pulled him in closer and kissed him firmly, just once.

“I'll be joining you in a moment,” he said, then turned from Will. Will immediately spun, his heart pounding as he moved through the closed doors and sat at the table. He listened to the sounds of Hannibal opening and closing drawers and resetting the oven, and quickly checked his back pockets for the small packets he had put in them earlier. Still there. His breath quickened, and he felt almost dizzy with need, a feeling that only increased when the door to the kitchen opened and Hannibal entered. He looked flushed, but his eyes were dark and focussed as he moved quickly over to Will. Without warning he grabbed Will's hand, yanking him from the chair, which he then kicked out of the way. Will clung onto Hannibal as he was lifted, wrapping his legs around Hannibal's waist as they came together in a fierce kiss. Hannibal stepped forward and deposited Will on top of the table, not once breaking the kiss but almost immediately shifting his hands to begin unbuttoning Will's shirt.

Will frantically began helping him, desperate to shed these layers and to divest Hannibal of his own. Buttons undone, Hannibal roughly shoved Will's shirt down off his shoulders, then together they did the same to Hannibal, waistcoat first, followed by shirt, and Will groaned as he ran his hands through the covering of thick hair covering Hannibal's chest.

Hannibal broke away from the kiss, moving instead to bite and suck his way down Will's neck, latching on to his collar bone and sucking hard until Will cried out. Will wrapped his hands around Hannibal's head, pinning him to the spot and ensuring he wouldn't move until he was well and truly marked. The scrape of teeth against his skin as Hannibal bit at him sent electricity shooting down his spine and he groaned again, loving every second of it.

It took him a moment to become aware of Hannibal working at his belt, but when he did he released Hannibal, leaning back to allow better access then lifting his hips so his pants could be slid down his legs. There was no waiting here, no asking if any of this was okay, just sheer unbridled *want* from the both of them. Will's boxers disappeared almost without him noticing, and those lips that had so recently been attached to his collarbone were now wrapped around his cock. He fell, lying back on top of the table as Hannibal sucked him down. He couldn't recall ever in his life making the noises that Hannibal was wringing from him now, didn't think he could stop them if he wanted to. The man's mouth felt like heaven,

and maybe it was, maybe he'd done better in his life than he'd thought he had and this was his reward after some unknowable death.

That mouth pulled away, and Will whined in need, lifting his head to see what had happened. Hannibal was pouring lube from a small packet onto his fingers, and he had no idea where he'd produced it from but frankly didn't care, as long as it got used on him sooner rather than later. Hannibal obliged, returning his mouth to Will's twitching erection as those fingers began circling his hole, gentle at first, then probing, before one slipped in without resistance. Will moaned again, pushing back against Hannibal's finger before thrusting back up into his mouth, babbling incoherently as he did so, not knowing what it was he wanted except that he wanted *more*.

Hannibal continued to work at him, never letting up with his mouth even as he pushed a second, and then a third finger inside, scissoring and crooking those digits until Will felt that flash of pleasure course through him.

“Fuck, Hannibal,” he moaned. “I'm going to come right now if you keep that up.”

Hannibal removed his fingers, looking up at Will after one last lick up his cock, his face now entirely flushed with pleasure.

“I have condoms in the back pocket of my pants,” Will managed to pant out, desperate to have Hannibal filling him. Hannibal cocked an eyebrow, looking both amused and wrecked.

“Did you come here with plans to seduce me, dear Will?”

“You're the one who conjured lube out of nowhere,” Will panted, wriggling in mixed discomfort and need.

“I find it's always best to be prepared,” Hannibal said with a smile.

“Then prepare yourself and get inside me,” Will demanded, all thoughts of modesty burned from his mind. Hannibal took no time at all in doing just that, the condom quickly retrieved, and his own pants removed. Will watched, wide-eyed, as Hannibal rolled the condom on then squeezed more lube out, generously coating his not insubstantial girth. Will couldn't wait to be filled with that cock, wanted it inside him more than anything. Hannibal lined up, easing his way in so painfully slowly, and Will found himself pushing back to increase the speed. Hannibal paused as he bottomed out, both men panting as they adjusted to the feeling. Hannibal leaned forward, kissing Will, then began moving. The slow, careful rate he started with didn't last long, not with Will wrapping his legs around Hannibal's waist and pulling him in ever faster, pushing back harder and harder. He wanted Hannibal to come inside him, wanted to see the look in his eyes as he was pushed over the edge, and he didn't have to wait long.

Hannibal seized up, his eyes squeezing shut as a muttered “Will” escaped his lips. Will drank it all in, the look of ecstasy on Hannibal's face, the pulsing of his cock as it emptied itself into the condom within him. They rocked slowly, both panting as Hannibal came back down. Will's dick was rock hard, and he knew it wouldn't take long at all before he was in the same

state as Hannibal. He reached down, but Hannibal swatted his hand away before he could make contact.

“Move back,” he demanded, voice harsh and low, and Will obeyed immediately. Hannibal held the base of his cock as Will moved, wincing at the feeling of Hannibal withdrawing. He lay still, staring at the ceiling and panting, listening to the sounds of Hannibal moving around again. He was shocked when Hannibal climbed up on the table with him, straddling his knees, the second condom in his hands. He groaned as Hannibal rolled it onto his cock, then groaned again when he saw Hannibal move. He had lifted himself up onto his knees, and had his fingers buried deep inside himself, his head thrown back. Will could barely move, his eyes fixated on the sight in front of him.

Hannibal removed his fingers with a wet sound, his hand coming back around to wipe the remaining lube along Will's cock. Slowly he crept forward, until he was level with Will's pelvis then just as slowly, just as deliberately, he lowered himself. The feeling was unbelievable, so tight and hot, and Will knew he wasn't going to last long, especially not when Hannibal began riding him, hips pumping up and down as they rotated in a figure eight. Will grabbed Hannibal's hips, fingers tight enough to no doubt leave bruises as Hannibal increased his speed until Will was coming, and coming hard, his vision wavering. Hannibal collapsed on top of him, the two of them panting in tandem. Will ran his hands down Hannibal's strong thighs, unable to believe that that, *any* of that, had just happened.

Chapter End Notes

I've actually had this scenario in my head for quite some time, so it was nice to get it actually written down :D

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal have a shower.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The two of them lay on top of the table, sticky, sweat cooling, and unutterably comfortable and content. In the back of Will's mind it occurred to him that lying, naked, on a hard wooden table was not something that should be comfortable, and that his body was more assuredly *not* going to thank him for it later, but in this moment he was entirely unable to move. He hissed as Hannibal reached down and gripped the base of Will's cock, shifting so Will was no longer inside him. The care with which Hannibal removed and tied off the condom filled him with affection, and he reached up to tug on his arm, pulling him back down next to him.

“C'mere,” he said, words slurring in his overly relaxed state. The wait for Hannibal to discard the condom over the side of the table, though only a second, was interminable. Will couldn't resist clinging to him when he finally returned, and he filed that particular reaction away for analysis later. For now he just twisted, resting his head on Hannibal's broad shoulder, his fingers scratching lightly through his chest hair. He couldn't say that chest hair had ever been something that had particularly appealed to him – not that it *didn't* appeal, it was just nothing that he'd ever really paid much attention to. On Hannibal though, he just couldn't get enough, couldn't resist the urge to touch it.

Hannibal pressed kisses to the top of Will's head. Their breathing was beginning to return to normal, and their rapidly cooling body temperatures meant that they couldn't remain here much longer, but Will closed his eyes and blocked out the passage of time as much as he could. There was something so very *right* about lying here with Hannibal, pressed to his side, leg hooked up across his thighs. Hannibal's arms encircled him, fingertips idly tracing patterns in Will's skin. Those arms tightened when the sound of the oven timer drifted out from the kitchen. Will couldn't help the whining sound he made, sure that they hadn't taken that long and it couldn't possibly be time to move yet.

“Don't get up,” he whispered, curling his fingers into the coarse hair beneath them. Hannibal huffed out a laugh, the breath stirring Will's hair.

“I must, or we will have a house full of the smoke of burnt pheasant, and likely the neighbours calling to report a fire. And no dinner,” he said, the last bit added on as though it was the worst possible outcome, like being found huddled and naked on top of a dining table by a group of fire fighters was no big deal. Who knew, maybe to Hannibal it wasn't. Will was very aware that this was the man who had no qualms about giving him a hand job in public,

in the middle of the day. In the shadowed, empty corner of a parking building, to be fair, but still in public. The memory had his dick giving a half hearted twitch of interest, so he shut that train of thought down immediately. He sighed, nuzzling his nose against Hannibal's skin a little more.

“Stay with me tonight,” Hannibal asked. His voice slightly hitched as he spoke, the sound causing Will to involuntarily tighten his grip on Hannibal's chest hair.

“Yes,” he whispered, hardly able to hear his own voice. His heart thumped in his chest as the ramifications of the request hit home. They'd just done this, here, on the table, and Hannibal still wanted him to stay. This wasn't a request for sex, it was a request for *Will*, for his company. This was something wholly more intimate than just further physical connections. He felt giddy, giggly. He needed...he wasn't sure what, exactly, he just *needed,* and it was almost like Hannibal was reading him down to his very core when he tilted Will's head up, their lips meeting again in soft wonderment.

“Good,” Hannibal said when they broke apart again. He gave Will one more peck on the lips, then sat up, pulling Will with him.

“Let me go and get the meat out to rest. We can shower while it is sitting.”

Will finally gave in and let go of Hannibal, who smiled at him as he slid off the table. He didn't bother to pull on his pants, striding with an astounding lack of self-consciousness out of the dining room and into the kitchen. The view was one that Will enjoyed thoroughly, not tearing his eyes away until well after the door had closed. He wondered idly whether working with hot food coming directly out of the oven while naked was necessarily a good idea, but decided that Hannibal knew what he was doing. He sat up, wincing slightly at the discomfort of the movement. It really had been too long since he had done anything like that, and while this was a very nice table indeed, when it came to the type of physical activity they had just done on it, it was still just a slab of wood. And slabs of wood, Will's shoulders and spine were telling him right now, were most definitely *not* intended to be comfortable for sensitive human parts.

He dropped down to the floor, stretching his arms up, and was still in the middle of that motion when Hannibal returned. The appreciative look he received would have made him flush red even a day ago, but right now he just wanted to bathe in it. Hannibal approached slowly, the smell of cooked pheasant and citrus hand soap following him. Will bent his spine back a little further, showing off, loving the way heat flashed in Hannibal's eyes at the movement.

“Follow me. Now,” Hannibal all but growled, spinning on the spot and moving up the stairs. Will followed hurriedly, adding his eagerness to do what Hannibal commanded to the list of things to be dissected later, but determined to enjoy it for now.

They approached the top of the stairs, Hannibal leading the way past what appeared to be a full set of Samurai armour into what was clearly the master – and by extension, *his* – bedroom. It was enormous, and cocooning, and instead of feeling intimidated Will felt instantly at ease.

“I hope you don't mind using my bathroom. I would have taken you to the guest one, but I feel we're a bit past that, now.”

Will had to agree with that, and signalled his comfort with a nod. It probably shouldn't have been so welcoming and relaxing standing here, both of them still completely naked in Hannibal's bedroom, but it was. Will sat on the edge of the enormous bed as Hannibal readied the shower. At first he wasn't sure if he should, given how immaculate Hannibal seemed to like keeping his house, and how decidedly *not* immaculate Will was currently feeling, but the look of dark lust that Hannibal gave him when he looked up put paid to any doubts. Something told him this bed would be smelling a lot more strongly of sex in the coming weeks.

Hannibal held out his hand, the look of lust passing, fading instead into something more intoxicated. It did things to Will, seeing the effect he was having on Hannibal. He didn't doubt for a second that a very similar look had been on his face, as well. Those strong arms of Hannibal's wrapped around him again as he approached. They weren't so very different in size, but somehow Will still felt dwarfed by man, unfailingly safe within his hold. It was harder than it should have been to move away from that grip, and step into the shower.

The water was warm, the pressure amazing, and Will closed his eyes to enjoy it. Hannibal stepped in behind him, closing the door but not coming any closer to Will for the time being. Will tilted his head back, allowing the water to run over and down him, washing away all obvious traces of their time downstairs while still leaving Will indelibly marked. He cracked open one eye and looked sideways towards Hannibal. The way the older man was openly staring, his eyes raking up and down Will's body, was something that Will didn't think he'd be able to get enough of. He'd never been looked at the way Hannibal was looking at him, like he was something to be devoured, and treasured, and held up above all others.

He held out a hand to Hannibal, pulling him under the water once he had him in his grasp. Together they stood, pressed together wherever possible, water flowing over them as though they were one entity. Hands traced gently over skin, each man intent on learning the other, finding every curve, every angle, every blemish and plane and mark. They didn't kiss again, too intent on committing this sight to memory. Nothing about this was in any way sexual, but it was by far and away the most *sensual* experience Will had ever had. Goose bumps followed the path of Hannibal's hands across his skin, and he could see his own fingers having the same effect on Hannibal.

When Hannibal finally did move away it felt like something was tearing from Will, and he had to resist the urge to grab Hannibal and force him back into their embrace. He was embarrassed at how relieved he was when Hannibal returned a moment later with a handful of soap, lathering the liquid between his fingers and then rubbing it directly onto Will's skin.

“Never heard of a flannel?” he asked, voice shaking through the half laugh he gave.

“Just here, just tonight, I don't think I can bear to have something separating us like that,” Hannibal murmured, his lips grazing Will's ear as he leaned in close. The shiver that ran through Will was noticeable to Hannibal, and Will buried his face in Hannibal's shoulder, his arms wrapping around Hannibal's waist to counter the very real threat of his knees collapsing beneath him. Broad, strong hands coursed over his back, up to his shoulders and back down

his sides, the smell of the body wash scenting the air around them. Gently, Hannibal turned Will until his back was pressed against Hannibal's chest, hands resuming their journey though this time they meandered their way over his pectorals, down his stomach and across the tops of his thighs.

Without warning, Hannibal suddenly dropped down, massaging fingers curving around Will's thighs, journeying down, down, down. Will had to throw his arms against the wall of the shower when Hannibal bit lightly at his ass, nose nudging against the cleft before Hannibal rose again, gathering Will in his arms and pulling him under the water once more.

As the water washed the bubbles away, Will wondered if he should return the favour. The choice was taken from him when Hannibal moved to lather himself up, movements far brisker and more clinical than they had been when he was washing Will. Will took Hannibal's hands, slowing them, looking into his eyes as they moved over his body together. The eye contact didn't break for long minutes, and Will gradually became aware of the faint tremor that was running through Hannibal's body. He let go of one of Hannibal's hands and reached up for the man's face, gently resting his palm on his cheek. Hannibal's eyes drifted shut at the contact, and Will couldn't resist taking the opportunity to lean in for a kiss.

Their bodies aligned perfectly, their mouths slotting together as though they had both been carved from the same piece of marble, and Will didn't know how he had gone so long without knowing this man. They broke apart again, breathless in the water raining on them.

“We should get out now,” Hannibal whispered hoarsely, peppering Will's neck with tiny kisses.

“Don't want to,” Will said. He arched his neck to allow Hannibal better access, then let out an honest to god whine when Hannibal stepped back.

“Dress,” Hannibal said, panting slightly, his eyes grown dark again. “I've left you a robe and boxers. I will bring us dinner, and we need not leave that bed again until tomorrow, if that is what you wish.”

Will just nodded, watching from under the shower as Hannibal left the bathroom, a towel slung low around his hips.

Chapter End Notes

Just a bit of end of date fluff today, because why not ♥♥

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal try to go out for lunch, and dark goings on are a-stirring.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

True to his word, Hannibal kept Will in his bed all night, and a fairly significant chunk of Sunday as well. They sat up late, feeding each other torn off pieces of pheasant and cold roasted vegetables, talking about everything and nothing, and both finding themselves entirely unable to keep from touching each other. They fell asleep tangled in each other's arms, and woke late in the morning in much the same position, neither of them even trying to resist the lure of lazy wake up sex. It was nearing lunch time when Will's grumbling stomach forced them both from their cocoon, stumbling into the shower, and it was well past noon by the time they emerged again in a cloud of steam and sated – for the time being – appetites.

The drive home that evening was something far harder than it had any right to be, and the way Hannibal refused to do anything other than push Will against the wall, kissing him harder and harder every time he managed to make a step towards the door, left Will with no doubts that it was as difficult for Hannibal to see him go as it was for Will. He was unsurprised when he arrived home and pulled out his phone to find a text message waiting, asking if he would like to go out for lunch the next day. Will grinned when he saw the time it was sent; Hannibal must have gone for his phone the moment Will was out of sight.

He unlocked the door, his grin threatening to split his face in two. He replied with a very definite yes, adding on that he missed Hannibal already. He hit send before he could second guess himself, and was more than pleased when the reply text arrived within minutes.

(8.44pm) I'm glad you have made it home safely. My house seems so much more empty now that you've gone.

Will wanted nothing more than to reach for Hannibal, to touch that face one more time. Just to look at him would have done, but he'd not even thought to ask Hannibal if he could have taken a photo. He tapped his fingers on his thigh, debating with himself for a moment before deciding that he'd never get anything if he didn't at least ask.

(8.48pm) If you're willing, I'd like to have a photo of you. I didn't take one this weekend, and I should have.

His heart thumped in his chest, and his tried to distract himself from waiting for the reply by flicking the light on and collecting his dogs around him. He felt a stab of guilt at leaving them overnight, and then for the whole day, but he'd had a feeling that something like that

was possible. He'd left them out extra food and water – most of which was now gone, he noted – but the way they were now leaping up on him, leaving muddy footprints showed they were -

Muddy footprints.

Hurriedly Will crouched down, checking the dogs over. Most of them were clean and dry, but Buster was covered in mud, and his fur was cold, as though he had just recently been out running in the snow. He couldn't have been, though. Will had only just got home, and he had been waiting for him with the rest of the pack. He stood again, slowly this time, and clicked at the dogs for silence. They sat, as well behaved as always, as Will moved carefully through the house, straining his ears for any sign of something that was off. He reached the back door, found it slightly ajar, and mild panic set in then. He opened the door further, looking out into the night, looking down at the two sets of footprints. One set entering, and the other, much fresher, possibly only left minutes before, leading away from the house.

~*~*~

To say that Will was uncomfortable at work the next day was an understatement. He'd searched his house after finding the open door, but couldn't find anything missing or out of place. The feeling of having his home, his safe place violated like that crawled under his skin, and while it had lessened somewhat now that he was at work, in the middle of the day, it was far from disappearing entirely. Likewise, he couldn't shake the feeling that whoever had broken in – and they had broken in, the destroyed lock on the door being proof of that – whoever it was had broken in for a specific reason, and it hadn't been to steal anything.

He hadn't told Hannibal about it, not even when he had replied to Will's request. His answer had, however, provided a welcome distraction once Will had put a temporary bolt on the back door and re-secured his house. The photo Hannibal had sent Will brought butterflies to his stomach. His hair was soft and loose, much as it had been when Will had left his house, falling gently over his forehead. He'd changed into a red sweater, but it was the look on his face that did something to Will. There was a half smile, and a heat in his eyes that told Will that Hannibal had almost certainly been remembering their night, or their morning, or even their goodbye that evening. He couldn't help but pull his phone out of his pocket every time he had the chance, just looking at that photo and smiling.

“Awww, he looks cute like that!”

Will leapt up in fright, suddenly aware of how *unaware* of everything he'd become. He shoved the phone into his pocket, feeling faintly guilty at how engrossed he had been in staring at a picture when he was supposed to be working.

“Hey, don't mind me. I think it's cute that you're so smitten.”

Bev pushed the door open, grinning at Will as she entered his office, but there was no teasing in her tone, just genuine pleasure at seeing Will happy.

“I'm not smitten,” he argued half-heartedly, but all it took was a raised eyebrow from Beverly to get him to cave. “Okay, fine, I'm smitten.”

He ducked his head, revelling in the way his happiness flowed through him just saying that out loud. As he did so, he had to acknowledge to himself that he was in very real danger of it going far, far beyond even that.

“So it was a good weekend all around, then?”

Her question, as innocent as it was, dampened things for Will. It *was* a good weekend, more than good in fact, but the way it had ended had him on edge. He moved away from the door, flopping down into his chair.

“It was,” he answered, not sure whether he should trouble Beverly with his worries.

“But?” she said, concern colouring her voice.

“Everything with Hannibal was good. Great. Better than that, even,” he said, smiling despite himself. “But when I got home I think I interrupted someone.”

“Interrupted someone? How?”

“The back door was open, and there were fresh footprints in the snow outside. Like, *really* fresh.”

“Did you call the cops? Tell me you called the cops.”

Will shook his head, and Beverly flicked her wrist, a slight slap against his shoulder.

“Why not? Whoever it was could have still been there!” she said, genuine concern filling her now.

“They weren't. And nothing was taken – at least, nothing I noticed was taken. I don't think whoever it was was going to leave much for the police to be bothered with.”

The more Will thought about the whole thing, and the more he was talking to Beverly about it, the more he was beginning to solidify some suspicions. He had no intention of mentioning those to Bev though, not yet.

“That's scary, Will. You need to be careful, especially since you're living in the middle of nowhere.”

“I'll be fine, Beverly. It was an off-putting end to an otherwise good weekend, is all.”

“If you're sure,” Bev answered dubiously. “And you know if you need to, you can always crash on my couch. Unless you have somewhere else in Baltimore that would be more welcoming?” she said slyly, a knowing look on her face. “I can't help but notice you saying that it happened at the end of your weekend, and I know your date was Saturday night. Are you implying that you spent the whole weekend there?”

Will looked down at his fingers, fidgeting, then looked back up.

“Not implying, stating,” he said. Bev let out a little squeal, and Will rolled his eyes affectionately. She was just happy for him, and he couldn't get annoyed about that.

“So you're definitely going to be seeing him again, right?”

“Yeah. Today, actually. He's going to pick me up for lunch again. In fact, he's probably not too far off now.”

“Indeed he is not.”

The voice floated in through the open door, causing Will's heart to surge even as he stood up, his chair flying back behind him. He grinned, taking in the sight before him. Hannibal's hair was back to its normal immaculate state, and he had his suit jacket folded over his arms, revealing a deep maroon shirt beneath a black waist coat. It looked divine on him, and he couldn't for the life of him tear his eyes away.

“Right, that's my cue to go and be somewhere else,” said Beverly, already squeezing her way out past Hannibal. “Good to see you again, Doctor Lecter, and I'll see you later, Will,” she said, though Will was still thoroughly captivated by the man in front of him.

“Bye,” he said distractedly.

“Good to see you too, Ms Katz.”

Hannibal didn't break eye contact with Will as he spoke, and Will was vaguely aware of Beverly laughing as she strolled away. He moved towards Hannibal, reaching out subconsciously and running his fingertips down Hannibal's upper arm.

“I thought I'd take you back to my house for lunch today,” Hannibal said, shifting until he was pressed against Will's front.

“Are you planning on seducing me, Doctor Lecter?” Will said, deliberately pushing his voice into a purr. He looked up through his eyelashes at Hannibal, making it entirely clear that he was very much for that idea.

“I hadn't planned on it, but I could be persuaded to change my mind,” he replied. Heat rushed through Will at the husky quality of Hannibal's voice, so different to just a moment before when he had greeted Beverly. Will dropped his hand down, palming Hannibal's cock through his pants, feeling the way he quickly grew hard beneath him. The speed of his response startled Will, and he glanced up at Hannibal again in surprise.

“You have me permanently on edge. It is inconvenient, at times,” he murmured, leaning down to capture Will's lips in a kiss. It was too much for Will to bear, and he kicked at the door, slamming it shut. He shoved at Hannibal, pushing him against the door, blocking anyone from being able to enter. Will could have locked it, but something about the potential for being walked in on set him on fire, and he decided instead to rely purely on Hannibal's body weight to give them enough of a barrier.

Hannibal for his part looked more than pleased by this sudden turn of events, throwing his suit jacket forward to land on the chair in front of Will's desk and pulling him in for a deep kiss. Will grabbed at Hannibal's hips, rubbing himself against the swell he felt there, before pulling away and dropping to his knees. It was short work for him to have Hannibal's trousers undone and pulled down to his knees, his cock springing free as he peeled the waistband of Hannibal's boxer briefs over it. He licked his lips, glancing up quickly at Hannibal. He was encouraged by what he saw, Hannibal's mouth hanging open and his eyes dark as he stared back down at him.

Will leaned forward, slowly leaning in and inhaling the scent of Hannibal, pressing a kiss to the base of his dick then licking his way to the tip. He heard a sharp inhale from above, and those long, elegant fingers tangled themselves in his hair.

“Will,” Hannibal whispered, but that was all he said before Will wrapped his lips around him, bobbing his head as he sucked and licked. This wasn't supposed to be sweet, or romantic. This was entirely about getting Hannibal off as fast as he could, and Will threw everything he had into it. He sucked harder, then pulled right back, working his tongue around the tip. Hannibal let out a grunt, his fingers tightening, pulling on Will's hair. The sting was amazing, further encouraging Will, and he relaxed his mouth and throat as much as he could then *pushed,* taking in as much as he could. Hannibal's cock bumped against the back of his throat, and his eyes watered as he fought the gag, swallowing convulsively. The strangled noise Hannibal made meant it was all worth it, and Will held there a moment longer before pulling back. He was astounded at Hannibal's self control, and half disappointed that he'd managed to refrain from actively fucking Will's mouth. He pulled off completely, looking up at Hannibal through hooded eyes.

“Take me, Hannibal. Fuck me like this. I can take it.”

He pushed forward again as Hannibal cut off a groan, trying hard to remain quiet lest anyone hear them, but Will was determined to make this as dangerous as possible. He took Hannibal into his mouth, and to his satisfaction Hannibal stopped holding back. His hands moved to the back of Will's head, and he began thrusting forward, shallowly at first but then with increasing franticness. It didn't take long until he let out another low grunt, his entire body tensing as he came down Will's throat, Will swallowing as much as he could. Some escaped, dripping down his lip, and he pulled back to look at Hannibal, his tongue darting out to retrieve it. Hannibal slid down the door to sit on the floor in front of Will, wonder in his eyes as he pulled him in for another deep kiss.

“There are not words for what you are, Will. Exquisite. Divine. *Beautiful.* None of them come close to doing you justice.”

Will drank in the taste of Hannibal, resting his hands on either side of his face as he held him close, kissing him over and over.

“There is nothing I wouldn't do for you,” said Hannibal, and Will knew with painful clarity that this was Hannibal being completely honest. They were in this, together, well and truly. “Anything you need, *anything*, just ask and I will do it.”

“I just need you,” Will said, kissing him again.

Chapter End Notes

Who knew Will would get off on doing things in (almost) public. Naughty Will, anyone could work out what you're getting up to.

So this is a bit more scene setting than anything, but I hope you enjoyed it anyway :D

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

In which Will and Hannibal come to more than one understanding.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will lounged against Hannibal's bench as he made them lunch, as promised. As expected, Hannibal couldn't just put together something simple, as much as he protested that it was. Will watched as he sliced home made rye bread, roasted vegetables, and freshly grilled chicken, then put together the most extravagant open sandwiches Will had ever seen.

“Of course you make your own salad dressing to go with your bread,” Will said, eyeing the way Hannibal theatrically drizzled the plates.

“Do you disapprove?” was the response, Hannibal raising an eyebrow in amusement. Will darted his hand out, dipping a finger into the bowl before Hannibal could pull it away. He slowly sucked the dressing off his finger, watching the way Hannibal's eyes widened ever so slightly as he did so.

“Oh I approve,” he said after he withdrew his finger with a pop. “I approve very much.”

And he did; the dressing was delicious, far better than anything currently contained in a plastic bottle in his fridge. Hannibal slid his plate over to him, and they both stood on opposite sides of the bench, facing each other in silence, eating their food.

“I know I shouldn't,” Hannibal said after a while, his eyes carefully focussed on his plate rather than on Will. “It's far too early to confess to these things, but I missed you last night. It was far more difficult to go to sleep, after having known what it is like to have you lying next to me.”

Will could feel his stomach swooping, and he gripped the edge of the bench with both hands. He stole a glance across at Hannibal, who had yet to look up at Will, instead still watching his own fidgeting fingers. *Interesting,* Will thought. Hannibal always seemed so confident, so put together, but this wasn't the first time he'd let that confidence crack when it came to Will.

“I missed you too.”

He looked up after a moment to find Hannibal staring back at him, absolute adoration painting his features. The look sent a floating heaviness that Will couldn't quite understand to his chest, and he had to look away before he became completely overwhelmed. If he had

been harbouring any doubts as to whether Hannibal truly felt anything for him, the way Will himself felt, they were well and truly dispelled now.

“But tell me,” Hannibal said, breaking the moment with a shaky voice, “How did you spend your evening?”

Will was entirely unsure whether to tell Hannibal. He was in little doubt as to how he would respond - he seemed to know Hannibal better than the short time they'd been together would suggest he should – but it felt wrong to keep something like that from him.

“Someone broke into my house. They didn't take anything,” he hurriedly added, as Hannibal's face darkened in anger, “but I'm going to have to change the lock anyway. It was completely shattered.”

“Break ins without obvious theft are often a sign of more nefarious motives, as I'm sure you're well aware, Will,” Hannibal said, his voice dangerously soft. Will could feel the anger and worry roiling off Hannibal, the waves of emotion crashing into him. He closed his eyes and took a breath, steadying himself.

“I'd feel better if you had someone stay with you, Will. Or if you stayed somewhere else entirely.”

Will felt himself torn in two opposing directions. Half of him wanted to maintain his normally fiercely guarded independence. But the other half...the other half very much wanted to take Hannibal up on the unspoken invitation to stay here again, to wrap himself up in Hannibal's arms where he knew without doubt he would always be safe.

“I have my dogs. They usually provide enough of a deterrent. Not many people are up for taking on seven dogs,” he said, prodding subtly at Hannibal, trying to goad the man into making his decision for him.

“And yet someone broke in yesterday anyway, regardless of the dogs. Would I be correct in assuming you didn't call the police?”

“You would.”

Hannibal sighed, his eyes narrowing in what looked like vague disappointment, tinged with...was that *anticipation*? Yet another intriguing reaction from Hannibal, one that Will was very interested in probing further.

“And would I also be correct in assuming that your first suspicion as to who it could possibly be is the same as mine?”

Will nodded, knowing exactly what Hannibal was thinking. There was only one person who had been showing a disproportionate level of interest in Will. Hannibal's eyes flashed again.

“It would be unwise of him to continue this pattern of behaviour. He does not have the right to touch you.”

“Because I'm yours?” Will said, trepidation and excitement warring for control of him, and he was disturbed by how badly he wanted to give himself over wholly to Hannibal.

“You are mine, just as I am yours. I would never lay an unwanted hand on you. But you inspire a merciless protective instinct in me, and I would defend you by any means necessary.”

Hannibal had moved around the bench as he spoke, and now he ran a hand through Will's hair, letting his palm settle on Will's cheek. Will closed his eyes, leaning his face into the touch. He pulled Hannibal close, his hands resting softly on his hips, and let Hannibal guide his head to his shoulder where he rested, the faint echoes of Hannibal's heartbeat just able to be heard.

“Maybe,” Will croaked, licking his lips then clearing his throat. “Maybe I can stay here tonight. And tomorrow. Put the dogs in a kennel for a few days, until we work out what the best course of action is.”

“Yes,” said Hannibal, his voice clear and strong. “We can make plans. Decide what to do, if and when we are able to catch him in the act.”

Will's own heart pounded at the statement, a curious blend of excitement and fear coursing through him, and he held onto Hannibal more tightly. A kiss pressed to the top of his head left Will certain that just as Hannibal had said he would do anything Will asked of him, Will would follow Hannibal anywhere he lead. The thought should terrify him.

It didn't.

~*~*~

Will returned to Hannibal's house that evening. He'd left work early, spending the afternoon arranging board for his dogs for the week, then collecting a few day's worth of clothes and other supplies. He was aware, disconcertingly so, of the way eyes followed him no matter where he went around the gardens. It made his skin crawl, and he was thankful that he wasn't going to be somewhere easily reachable. There was little doubt left in his mind that Matthew was the one responsible for the break in, and he said as much to Beverly when he asked her to cover for him for the afternoon. She'd stared at him for a moment, flabbergasted, before seeming to accept and believe it.

“Are you going to report him?” she'd asked.

“I have nothing more than a feeling to base it on, so I can't see them doing much more than laughing me out of the station. I'm going to stay with Hannibal for a few days, until we can work out what to do about it.”

He couldn't help but grin as he'd said that, and Beverly had just looked at him with a knowing expression.

“It makes sense!” he'd attempted to argue, trying to convince her – himself? – that it was just for practicality reasons. She hadn't bought it at all, and Will couldn't blame her. At least she'd

refrained from teasing him about it.

And so now, here he was, hauling a couple of bags out of his car and lugging them up to Hannibal's front door. He rang the doorbell, waiting with impatient nerves for the man in question to let him in. The door opened, Hannibal quickly swooping to take Will's bags from him. They were far from heavy, just a couple of changes of clothes, his laptop, toothbrush, but if Hannibal was determined to play the gracious and polite host, Will wasn't about to stop him. They stepped into the foyer, Hannibal stopping to scoop something off the side table.

“These are for you,” he said, holding out a set of keys. Will's eyes widened, flicking between Hannibal's face and his hand. He seemed to understand Will's hesitance.

“There will be times, even just in the few days you are here, where you may wish to come and go while I'm out. It's much more practical for you to have your own keys. I assure you, there is nothing presumptuous on my part.”

“Who's to say I'm not going to be presumptuous?” Will answered with a choked laugh. Hannibal just smiled warmly, not answering the question, then moved further into the house, leaving Will to follow behind.

The rest of the evening was spent in companionable domesticity; Will helped Hannibal with dinner (filet mignon with balsamic glaze, Hannibal had proclaimed, and Will's taste buds were now *demanding* that he never leave this man's house again), before they stood, side by side, washing the dishes. Dishes done, they had retreated to the living room, where in short order Will found himself half stripped, straddling Hannibal's lap and rutting at him like his life depended on it.

Hannibal sucked on Will's tongue, hard, and the feeling was unlike anything Will had ever experienced before. He moaned, growing impossibly harder, frustrated with the way their pants prevented anything but the most teasing level of pressure. His moan quickly turned to a whine, Hannibal releasing him with a low laugh, then bucking his own hips up to chase after that same elusive touch.

They were both panting, utterly breathless, Will on the verge of giggles because of the emotion swelling within him. He captured Hannibal's lips again, desperate to feel, taste more of him. He was powerless to stop the rocking of his pelvis, no more able to control himself than Hannibal seemed to be, with the way his hands plunged down into Will's pants and grabbed handfuls of his ass. A dry finger slid into his cleft, touching only lightly enough to tease as it ghosted over his hole, but it was enough to shatter the remains of Will's self control.

“Fuck, just fuck me already, Hannibal,” he groaned, neither noticing nor caring how wanton he sounded.

“Do you trust me, Will?” Hannibal whispered, pressing kisses down Will's neck.

“Yes. God, yes.”

That was all the encouragement Hannibal needed, and he stood, lifting Will with him. He moved quickly, striding up the stairs as though Will weighed nothing, and Will marvelled at the hidden strength that he must have. He kicked the bedroom door open, and threw Will on the bed, his face wild with need. Diving forward, he drove Will up the bed as he crawled over him on hands and knees, Will's legs falling open to welcome him in. They kissed, remaining joined as they frantically worked to completely strip each other, clothes tossed off the bed, heedless of where they wound up.

The second they were both naked, Hannibal moved down, shoving Will's legs up to rest on his shoulders, then plunged his face down. He nuzzled at Will's balls for a moment, before dropping even lower, lapping at Will's hole like a man starved. Eyes squeezed shut, Will just barely managed to keep himself from bucking up into Hannibal's face, a fine thread of self control that was further tested when Hannibal's tongue began pushing into him. It was fast, frantic, and filthy, Hannibal's purrs of pleasure vibrating up Will's spine.

Abruptly Hannibal pulled away, turning to rummage in his bedside drawer. He returned with two bottles, one of which he passed to Will, and a condom. The drawer remained conspicuously open, and Will noticed the way Hannibal's hand hovered over it before retreating.

“Is there something more in there?” he asked, curiosity burning at him.

“There is,” Hannibal answered huskily. “I know you said you trust me, but...”

“I do trust you,” Will interrupted. “Completely.”

Hannibal looked down at him in something close to awe, then reached back into the draw. He pulled out a slim black device, long and thin with an angled bulb on the end.

“Do you know what this is?” he asked.

Will shook his head, but couldn't stop the way his dick pulsed and twitched just at the sight of it. He didn't know what it was, but he had a very good idea what it was likely used for.

“This is a prostate massager. I had hoped you would allow me to use it on you.”

Will just nodded, slowly at first, then with increasing vehemence. His cock throbbed painfully, and he nodded again.

“Oh god, yes, Hannibal...” he whispered, voice trailing off as he looked at the massager. Hannibal surged forward again, kissing Will hard. He pulled back suddenly, staring Will in the face, the blatant adoration and worship almost too much for Will to bear. He sat up, taking the bottle back from Will and pouring a generous squirt over his fingers. He moved back down, pushing one of those fingers into Will. The preparation was not drawn out, the massager barely being bigger than two of Hannibal's fingers even at its widest. Hannibal drizzled more lube over Will's hole, pushing it in, making sure he was slick and dripping. He arose once more, reaching for the second bottle, coating the massager with a few drops.

“This will feel a bit different to what you're used to,” Hannibal said. “This is a prostate stimulating gel. It will feel warm. Very warm.”

The anticipation was almost enough to have Will coming right then and there, and he squeezed his eyes shut, willing himself back from the edge as Hannibal pushed the massager slowly in.

“Fuck!” he exclaimed, shocked at the sensation. Hannibal was right. It was unlike *anything* he had ever felt before.

“I'm going to prepare myself, now, Will. I won't turn on the massager until we're ready.”

Will nodded again, unable to form a single coherent word. His eyes remained shut tightly, until he heard the wet sounds of Hannibal preparing himself. He looked up to see Hannibal kneeling above him, his back turned, giving him the perfect view of three of Hannibal's fingers entering himself, moving in and out, wider and wider. As much as he wanted to watch more, between that and the massager and gel inside of him, if he watched any longer this was going to be over before it even started.

When Hannibal lowered himself down, slick spreading across Will's stomach so he could roll the condom onto Will's cock, he had to turn his head to bite his own arm. The pain was all he had to ground himself, to pull himself away from the pleasure Hannibal was inflicting on him before he got lost to it entirely. He bit harder when Hannibal shuffled forward, lifting himself once more while gripping Will's cock, then lowering himself slowly, too slowly, until he was fully seated on Will.

And then he turned on the massager.

Will couldn't help himself and he bucked up, hard, even Hannibal's weight not enough to keep him still.

“Fuck!” he cried again, over and over, as Hannibal gently moved the massage around even as he rocked up and down on top of Will, his back still turned. The dual sensations, being filled and warmed from inside, and encased inside Hannibal, were enough on their own, but watching his cock moving in and out of Hannibal was too much, and it was only the work of minutes before he was coming, an orgasm more blinding than any he had ever experienced electrifying every last inch of him, inside and out. He was dimly aware of Hannibal clenching around him, the warm wet feeling of his come splattering against his thighs, but he was unable to do anything to help.

He cried out again as Hannibal slowly raised himself, Will's softening cock sliding out, and switched the massager off. He removed it with even greater care, and Will lost track of time after that. He came to, regaining his focus, to find Hannibal gently washing him with a damp cloth.

“I didn't even see you leave,” he mumbled. Hannibal just laughed quietly.

“I think we can call that experiment a success,” he remarked, moving the cloth slowly over every part of Will's body that he could reach.

“Do you need me to...” he gestured vaguely at the cloth, then at Hannibal, who merely smiled again.

“I washed myself up while you were recovering,” he said, finally finishing his work. Will took the cloth, throwing it to the ground, and pulled Hannibal down next to him, burying himself within his arms. They lay in silent bliss for a while, neither willing to move from the embrace and the comfort and safety it provided.

“Imagine if we'd done this at my house,” Will said eventually. “If Matthew is the one who broke in, he might have had quite a shock.”

“Anyone who found it acceptable to watch you like that would find themselves regretting it.”

Will shivered at the dark tone Hannibal's voice took.

“You're here to protect me?” he asked.

“Always.”

“What would you do to protect me?” Will asked, unsure of why he was keeping this going, except that the more possessive Hannibal became, the more Will craved it.

“Anything necessary.”

"Would you hurt someone?"

"Yes."

“Would you kill for me?”

The silence stretched for long moments, until Will began to fear he had pushed too far.

“In a heartbeat.”

The answer stilled Will's heart, and he wiggled closer, pushing himself as far into that embrace as he was capable of going.

Chapter End Notes

So yeah, while this is still predominantly a fluff fic, here is where we head into the slightly darker segment of the story.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will start planning.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will stretched, glancing across the prone form of a still sleeping Hannibal Lecter to check the time. Normally he would be getting up now, preparing for the long drive in to work, but staying at Hannibal's house had a number of unexpected benefits; not least of which, at that particular moment, was the fact that he only had to drive for less than ten minutes to reach the gardens, rather than over an hour. He rolled over, burying his face in the pillow beneath. The movement stirred Hannibal just enough to encourage him to reach for Will, and Will was only too happy to oblige, wriggling his way across until he was firmly wrapped up again. That particular benefit, Will mused, was both expected, and exceedingly pleasant.

He had spent so long without this. Even when he and Molly were together, it wasn't ever quite like this. Molly had always preferred to sleep unimpeded, and so they had tended to stick to their own sides of the bed while sleeping. Hannibal, though...Hannibal did *not.*

The sleepy nuzzling on the top of Will's head caused him to let out a contented sigh, his own arm tightening around Hannibal's torso. They lay in silence for a few minutes more, until the nuzzling became small kisses, Hannibal inhaling Will's scent as he did so.

“Good morning,” whispered Will. He kept his eyes closed, adjusting his head minutely so he was lying more comfortably on Hannibal's shoulder, and lifted his leg to rest atop Hannibal's. In another life he would have been mildly ashamed of the way his pelvis automatically began rocking softly against Hannibal's hip, but now he just enjoyed it. Neither of them were particularly hard, but the gentle shifting was nice. Comfortable. Will was done with trying to analyse the way he'd fallen so completely into Hannibal's orbit, especially after the understanding they'd reached the night before, and so he just lay still, listening to the sounds of Hannibal breathing.

“I meant what I said, last night,” Hannibal finally said in response to Will's greeting. It stilled him briefly, his arm shifting from being wrapped around Hannibal's waist, lifting instead to toy idly with his coarse chest hair.

“Good.”

“However,” Hannibal began, and damn if that didn't cause Will's heart to seize up. The sudden tightening of his fingers in Hannibal's hair had to have hurt him, but there was no

reaction beyond a small pause in his speech. He continued on, one hand raising to caress Will's hair.

“I also feel that in situations that would result in you feeling you would require my intervention, you should stop. Step back, and ask yourself how far you are willing to go yourself. It is always better for us, if we know we are capable of protecting ourselves.”

Will mulled that over for a moment, testing his response in his mind, rolling the words around his mouth before he spoke out loud.

“Do you know that you can protect yourself?”

“I do,” Hannibal answered, a simple statement of fact. Will knew exactly what he was referring to.

“The patient that died in your office. The man who attacked him.”

“I defended myself to the extent that I was capable of. Against both of them.”

Will wondered how much of it was self-defence, and how much of it was simply because he *could*. He decided he didn't care.

“I wouldn't know where to start.”

“You are young. Fit. Strong,” Hannibal said, punctuating each word with another kiss to the top of Will's head. “You also hold unique knowledge.”

“I know plants,” Will responded, preening under the attention.

“You do. Have you given any further thought to the suggestion I made the night of the auction?”

Will blinked in confusion at the sudden subject change.

“Suggestion?” he asked, searching his memories for something that would fit. And *oh.* There it was.

The poison garden. He lifted up, legs straddling Hannibal, arms on either side of Hannibal's head as he propped himself up.

“Are you suggesting I try to poison Matthew Brown?”

“Try to? No, not at all,” Hannibal said, the underlying meaning as clear as anything Will had heard in his life. “Matthew is a recent annoyance. The garden is something I have given some thought to, for some time.”

Will stared down at the face below him, his gaze tracing the lips that were ever so slightly curved up in a faint smile. His thoughts were in turmoil, spinning and circling around one bright, pulsing point of light, the light that was driving it all.

“I -” he cut himself off, not sure he was willing yet to give voice to that thought, that *feeling,* as bright and strong as it was. Instead he savoured the way Hannibal looked at him, looked *into* him, didn't shy away from him the way people normally did if ever he lowered his carefully constructed veneer. It had been so many years since he had done so that the mask had begun to almost felt more real than what lay beneath. He took a breath, let it out slowly, letting the words travel with it and hoping that maybe they would work their way to Hannibal's ear anyway.

“We already have plants that would be a useful starter,” was what he did say, and the way Hannibal's eyes lit up as he spoke filled him with excitement. “Foxglove and devil's trumpets would be an excellent starting point as examples of how toxic plants can look appealing, if we wanted to make this an educational endeavour.”

“Digitalis and datura poisoning can happen so easily, if the proper precautions are not taken,” Hannibal agreed, reaching up to run his fingers down the side of Will's face. Will closed his eyes again, tipping his head to chase the pressure of those fingers until Hannibal relented and cupped his face.

“I foresee no difficulty sourcing more plants,” Hannibal said, his fingers curling behind Will's ear. “A manchineel tree, perhaps.”

Will nodded, his eyes opening again, meeting Hannibal's.

“If we are very lucky,” Hannibal murmured, “there will be more than one corpse flower blooming this year.”

Will shivered, then leaned down to press a kiss to Hannibal's lips.

~*~*~

Bedelia took a sip of her coffee, eyes not moving from Hannibal. He had little doubt she had seen what he wanted her to see, though. Will's shirt, left draped over the back of a chair. An extra pair of shoes in the foyer. Small things, that in any other house would have gone unnoticed, but in Hannibal's house were as good as a neon sign proclaiming Will's extended presence here, regardless of whether the man himself was around.

“So,” Bedelia said, her eyes narrowing slightly. “What did you want to see me for, Hannibal?”

She didn't ask why he had insisted that she see him here, rather than him coming to see her. Another point in favour of her having seen what he wanted her to see.

“As you know, I've been interested in the idea of a section of the gardens devoted to toxic plants. The most beautiful, yet deadly ones that nature has defended herself with. I believe I have found the right person to cultivate it.”

“Let me guess. Will Graham.”

Her voice retained its normal serene tone, but there were touches of cold irritation beneath.

“He is uniquely qualified.”

“And your personal attachment to him is in no way driving this decision?”

Hannibal could always count on Bedelia to get right to the point, when she felt the situation warranted it. She could play the game with the best of them, but when she decided she had tired of it, she would let him know in no uncertain terms. This was one of those situations.

“My personal attachment, and my wishes for this to be the best it can be happen to coincide. I won't pretend otherwise. But he *is* the most suited to fulfil how I have always imagined the display being built, and utilised.”

“He won't be able to do it on his own,” Bedelia protested calmly. “Something of this size will require more than one pair of hands.”

Hannibal watched Bedelia for a moment, as though thinking over her words. He had already given this some thought, but it paid to let others believe they held influence.

“Do you have any suggestions?”

“Matthew Brown is the head horticulturist. It would make sense to have him oversee the establishment of the site, and the introduction of any new species. Will can co-ordinate.”

Hannibal smiled, pleased he had not had to suggest the man himself. Will wouldn't be happy, but he doubted it would take much convincing to get him to see the wisdom of keeping Matthew very involved.

“Mr Brown seems to have a great fascination for Will. I hope this will encourage a strong working relationship between the two of them.”

“A relationship of some sort,” Bedelia muttered, lifting her cup back to her lips, her blue eyes staring directly into Hannibal's. She was needling him, but with no real effort behind it. He chose to pretend he hadn't heard her and turned to the fridge.

“Can I persuade you to join me for lunch? I have plenty of leftovers that need to be used.”

“No,” she replied, draining the last of her coffee before standing. “I have appointments to keep, Hannibal. Not all of us are able to remain at such a loose end as you choose to.”

Once again, Hannibal chose to ignore the barb. His relationship with Will seemed to have had an interesting effect on Dr du Maurier. He didn't believe she was jealous, not in a romantic sense, but there was *something* about it that had ruffled her feathers. It was interesting, and something he fully intended to find out more about.

~*~*~

“I believe the good news will be announced this week, perhaps as early as tomorrow,” Hannibal said as he set the dinner plate down in front of Will with a flourish (“Blanquette de Veau,” he had stated ostentatiously, a habit Will was beginning to grow rather fond of).

“That soon?” he replied, taking a forkful of the food in front of him. “If you keep giving me food like this, Hannibal, I'm never going to end up leaving your house.”

Hannibal gave a half smile as he seated himself.

“That is hardly incentive for me to stop.”

Will flushed at the implication, but couldn't bring himself to argue. Already he was far too comfortable here. He did miss his house, and there was no way he could live without his dogs for any extended period of time, but the rest of it...waking up with Hannibal, having him be the last thing he saw before closing his eyes at night? There was very little else he could imagine ever wanting.

They ate their dinner, chattering aimlessly, but when they laid their forks down Hannibal grew serious. Will watched as he folded his hands, then unfolded them immediately.

“Is there something you need to tell me?” he asked, amused at the little nervous habits Hannibal displayed whenever he was around Will. He knew that they were at least partly calculated, could see Hannibal's inner workings. It didn't make it any less endearing, the way he deliberately went out of his way to put Will at ease.

“You will be working with someone, on this little project.”

“Yeah, you I hope.”

“I mean at work. Bedelia has suggested Matthew Brown to co-run the development of the garden, and I agreed.”

All amusement fled Will at Hannibal's words.

“You want me to work right next to the person who broke into my house, who is displaying some *very* unsettling behaviour?”

He was pleased with how even and calm he had kept his voice.

“It is the best plan, for what we want to use him for,” Hannibal said, as collected and sure of himself as ever. And as irritated as Will was, he couldn't help but admire it.

“Please, enlighten me on how this is a good idea.”

“You will set his schedule. You will observe his habits. He will be observing you, but you hold the advantage. He is unlikely to try anything at work, and at this stage has no idea that you know of his involvement.”

“We don't *know* anything,” Will interrupted. “I have my gut instinct. That instinct is rarely wrong. I know how to read people, and read them well, but we have no proof.”

He had no idea why he was arguing with Hannibal, except perhaps to prove that he wasn't going to do whatever Hannibal said, just because he was the one saying it. Any decisions Will made about his life would be his own.

“I can help with that. While you have him busy at work, it will be the simplest of things for me to investigate further. If he did take anything from your house, I have no doubt I will find it at his.”

Will looked at Hannibal incredulously.

“You want me to work with him so you can what, play at being a cat burgler? What if you get caught? I won't have you taken from me over something so petty.”

If there was one reaction Will was definitely *not* expecting from Hannibal, it was laughter.

“What's so funny?”

“Your passion, Will. It runs hot, does it not?”

Will stared at Hannibal a moment longer, his anger leaking from him more the longer Hannibal smiled back at him.

“Fine,” he huffed, suppressing his own smile. “But I want to see that stocking over your head before you go off on your little adventure.”

“I will most certainly not be wearing a stocking on my head,” Hannibal said, and Will let out his own laugh at the offended look on his face.

“So we are in agreement, then?” Hannibal asked, reaching his hand across the table, palm up. Will regarded it for a moment, then slid his own hand to meet it. Their fingers interlaced, and Hannibal lifted Will's hand and drew it towards him to lay a kiss on it.

“Work on sourcing the Manchineel tree as soon as you are able,” Hannibal murmured. “It is going to be the centrepiece of the whole design.”

Anticipation, excitement, need. All of those things rushed through Will at Hannibal's words, and at his touch.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, Hannibal may not be a cannibal in this 'verse, but he's still Hannibal ;D

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Hannibal has plans for Will

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

For Will the week passed in a blur of food, sex, and missing his dogs. For Hannibal, it was enhanced further by the knowledge that Will was not only what he had thought he was, but he was more. So very much more than even Hannibal could have predicted, and he could feel himself falling for Will a little more every day. To say it was disconcerting would be an understatement; Hannibal couldn't recall *ever* feeling like this about anyone in his life. Affection, regard, respect? Of course. But this overwhelming, all-consuming need to have and to be had was something that he had no experience with at all.

If Hannibal didn't know any better, he'd suspect he was not just falling, but already completely, irrevocably in love with Will Graham. As it was, his suspicions were instead beginning to revolve around the fact that perhaps there was a part of himself that he didn't know as well as he thought he did. Who could possibly have thought that he would have found himself here after that first time he had laid eyes upon Will? He was beautiful, almost indescribably so, but Hannibal had seen beautiful people before. It was a habit of his, to seek out everything that pleased his senses. But Will...Will was on a completely different level, in every possible respect, not just physically.

Just like his inexperience with the sheer level of emotion he was feeling, Hannibal was also inexperienced with living in such close quarters with someone. Every instinct he had, everything he thought he knew about himself told him that he should be at the very least uncomfortable with the way Will had slid so effortlessly into his life, that he should be looking forward to Will eventually returning to his own home. He *wasn't* uncomfortable, and he most certainly was not looking forward to Will leaving. Quite the contrary; he had found himself trying to imagine ways in which Will *didn't* have to go home. Normally Hannibal didn't find himself shying away from manipulating people to get what he wanted, but he found himself strangely reluctant to do so. Not unless he had to. And so, here he was, showered, still clad only in a towel tied around his waist, waiting for Will to return home.

He had laid out tuxedos for the both of them, each one lying carefully next to the other on the bed. Will had no idea what he had planned – he hadn't had any idea himself, not until the day before when he'd suddenly realised that Will was due to return home.

He may have panicked a little.

He heard the sound of the door closing downstairs, followed by footsteps entering the kitchen.

“Hannibal?”

The voice floating up was mildly confused. Every day this week Hannibal had been in the kitchen when Will returned

(home)

to Hannibal's house, so it only made sense that he would be wondering about the sudden change of routine.

“Upstairs, Will,” he called out. He wasn't nervous. Far from it, really; rather, anticipation swelled in him. He strode out of the bedroom as Will reached the top of the stairs, closing his eyes and inhaling the fresh, earthy smell that always surrounded him after a day spent working with his plants. When he opened them again it was to see Will leaning back slightly, hands in his pockets, shamelessly taking in the sight in front of him. This was just another facet of Will that Hannibal had not expected to see shown to him so easily, and yet here they were. He preened a little under the attention, a movement that didn't go unnoticed by Will.

“Planning on celebrating getting rid of me early, are you?” he said, his gaze slipping down Hannibal's still damp torso again.

“Never,” Hannibal said, deliberately dropping his voice lower. “Go and have a shower, Will. I'm taking you out tonight.”

Will's eyebrows lifted slightly in soft surprise.

“Where are we going?”

“It's a surprise, though if you really need to know I will tell you.”

“No, I'm fine.”

His voice trailed off, and Hannibal looked more closely at him. His face was not closed off, not exactly, but he was certainly doing his best to shutter off some emotion.

“Will?” he asked, not saying anything further. He'd rather let Will decide for himself what he would like to share. Hannibal could be as patient as he needed to be, to have Will unburden himself.

“Nothing,” Will said after a few quiet moments spent gazing intently at Hannibal. It was a feeling he didn't think he'd ever get tired of, to have Will's attention so focussed on him. “It just occurred to me that apart from that one time at lunch...”

He trailed off, flushing red at the memory. It was a vision Hannibal decided he must capture one day. Will cleared his throat.

“Apart from that, we haven't really been on a real, public date. I haven't been on a date like that in years.”

“Would you prefer we stay home?” Hannibal would be disappointed if that were the case, but there was nothing in his plans for Will that required they go out tonight. That was entirely to do with his need to show Will off.

“No, I'd – I'd really like to go out. I'm just warning you that I may not be entirely what you expect, if you're planning on taking us somewhere social.”

Hannibal was seized by an irrational need to throw Will to the bed and chew every last bit of self-consciousness out of Will, eat every last part of him that made him doubt himself. With some effort he caged that beast inside of him and stepped forward, taking Will's face in his hands.

“All I expect from you is to be who you are, Will. Nothing more, nothing less. You are perfect, to me.”

Will's arms darted out to hold Hannibal's shoulders. The breath that rushed out of him as Hannibal spoke appeared to leave him unsteady, a reaction Hannibal had hoped for, but was somehow still unprepared to react to. He shifted his hands, instead wrapping them around Will's waist as they leaned into one another, Will's head coming to rest on his chest. He couldn't resist nuzzling his way into Will's hair, a habit he had developed that he knew Will had noticed, but seemed to enjoy nonetheless. Indeed, he sighed as Hannibal did so, pressing himself a little closer.

“How have I lived without you in my life?” Will asked, the whisper almost too low for Hannibal to hear. Almost. But he did hear it, and it sent blood surging through his body, his heart pounding and his stomach flipping. All of these physical reactions to such a simple statement. It was definitely entirely new to Hannibal, and he wanted more of it. *Much* more.

“So will you come out tonight? Do you want to know what I have planned? I assure you, it is nothing overly arduous, and if you wish to leave at any time you need only ask.”

Will nodded, his breath warming the exposed skin.

“Of course I will. And no, surprise me. I'm sure I'll have fun no matter what we do.”

Hannibal smiled. He waited for Will to stand, then followed him into the bedroom.

Chapter End Notes

So yeah, I'm sorry this is such a short chapter. Too many sick, crying children in the house made it almost impossible to get much of anything done. Hopefully more on

Tuesday!

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Hannibal takes Will out, and things don't quite go as planned.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Despite Will's best efforts, they made it to the car with no particular delay. He found the thought of them in complementing, though different tuxedos, exhibited as a couple in every sense, far more of a turn on that he had thought possible. When he had exited the shower (which he had been forced to take alone, no matter how he had begged Hannibal to join him), he had been reduced to mute disbelief at the image before him.

Hannibal had been standing in front of his mirror, fully dressed, making the finishing touches to his hair. To see him like this, displayed as though gift wrapped, purely for Will to open, was too much for Will to bear. He had moved forward, joining him in only a few steps, and reached his hand up to glide along Hannibal's smooth, strong jaw. Hannibal's eyes had drifted shut as Will's fingers had wandered, memorising the feel of his face. Lips parted as Will pushed his fingers against them, Hannibal's tongue darting out briefly to wet the tips. It was only when Will leaned up and began pressing small, wet kisses along Hannibal's jaw that he came to his senses and gently, but firmly pushed Will back.

“There is nothing I would like more,” he had whispered, voice clearly strained. “But if we are to make our reservation you need to get ready now.”

Will had been disappointed, and so decided to take his revenge by drying and dressing as slowly, and provocatively, as possible. He had turned his back to Hannibal, dropping his towel then bending over slowly to dry his ankles. Making sure Hannibal's attention was firmly captured, he had wiggled just slightly, relishing the sudden intake of breath it caused. The rest of his dressing time had followed in much the same fashion, and while he was perfectly capable of figuring it out himself, he had taken advantage of the fact that he had a bow tie to further his attempted seduction. Wobbly fingers had obliged, and while it took far longer to tie the bow perfectly than Will was sure it otherwise would have, his plan still failed.

“I'm starting to doubt my attractiveness,” he had teased, but the flash of heat in Hannibal's eyes made it perfectly clear what effect he had had on him.

“Under any other circumstances I would be fucking you senseless,” Hannibal had growled, seizing Will's shoulders and pressing him against the wall. Will had shivered at the

unexpected dirty talk from Hannibal, and shivered further when Hannibal had grabbed Will's hand and pressed it to his groin.

“You see what you do to me, you cruel creature?”

Will had pressed against the throbbing hardness beneath his hand, wondering vaguely how Hannibal was able to maintain such a put together exterior while having to deal with *that*. Hannibal had hissed, then backed away, his eyes shut tight.

“Come,” he had said, and Will's own eyes had to squeeze shut as his dick gave very serious thought to doing exactly what Hannibal had commanded. When he opened them again, Hannibal had left the room, and Will had to hurry to catch up.

When they reached the bottom of the stairs, Hannibal retrieved his overcoat from the closet, pulling out a brand new one for Will at the same time. He swung it about, indicating that Will should lift his arms, and put it on him. Just like the tuxedo, it fit him perfectly, its soft, thick, tailored wool draping about his body in all the right places.

“Should I even ask how you know my measurements when even I don't?” he asked, reaching for Hannibal's face again to trace a fond finger along his skin.

“I've seen enough of you this week to make an accurate guess,” Hannibal responded, reaching for Will's hand and pulling it to his lips for a kiss. Will let his fingers curl around Hannibal's, then pulled them down to lay a soft kiss of his own on them. The gesture resulted in a soft smile blooming across Hannibal's face. It was perfect, Will thought. *He* was perfect.

“Shall we go, then?”

Will nodded, and followed Hannibal to the car. Apparently Hannibal was pulling out all the stops tonight, because he opened Will's door for him, pressing another kiss to Will's hand as he got in, before shutting it and moving to the driver's side.

“So is this a dinner and a show type date?” Will asked once they were under way.

“Perhaps,” Hannibal answered cryptically, a small smile gracing his features. Will didn't push it, content with whatever they did, as long as they did it together. He found it extraordinarily difficult to look away from Hannibal, the way the street lights lit up his face, alternately smoothing then highlighting his sharp facial features, features that were currently arranged in a particularly appealing state of calm concentration.

He looked over at Will, amused questioning in his eyes.

“God, you're beautiful,” Will said softly, watching as the amusement faded and was replaced by such a devout look of longing and affection that he could hardly catch his breath. They held each other's gaze as long as they dared before Hannibal had to look back at the road, a wholly different tension filling the air. Will felt as though his chest might burst, and he knew exactly what that feeling was, but he had no idea if Hannibal truly felt it too, or if he was just projecting his own feelings onto him.

He looked at Hannibal a moment longer before tearing his eyes away to look out the window instead. He reached out, resting his hand lightly on Hannibal's thigh. It only sat there a second before Hannibal's own hand came down to grip his, and Will turned his so their fingers could twine together. He couldn't have stopped the smile that appeared after that even if he wanted to, and he most assuredly did *not* want to. He wasn't sure what exactly he had done to deserve this man in his life, but he was going to do all that he could to keep him.

They stayed like that for the remainder of the drive, until it was time for Hannibal to park the car. He kissed Will's hand one more time – and god, Will was never going to get over the way such a simple gesture made him feel – then released him, bringing the car to a halt. They sat in the darkness, Will acutely aware of what had happened the last time they were near a parked car, alone.

“Shall we?” Hannibal finally broke the silence between them, looking to Will for confirmation. If Will was honest with himself, he would have been quite happy to remain in this car, to keep Hannibal entirely to himself, but he knew that this was something that Hannibal was very much looking forward to. He nodded.

“Only if I get a proper kiss before we go,” he said, holding his hand out to Hannibal.

“Of course,” Hannibal replied, leaning across, cupping his hand around the back of Will's neck and pulling him close. Their lips brushed, feather light, Hannibal briefly resting his forehead against Will's and nuzzling at his nose before moving to kiss him properly. It was soft, and intimate, and far more sensual than any kiss Will had ever had. His hands flew up of their own volition, clinging to Hannibal as he tried to regain a sense of balance, because this, with Hannibal? It was too much, but not even close to enough. The kiss grew deeper, more frantic, until they both pulled away, panting, but still clinging to one another.

“If we wish to make it out of this car, I suggest we leave now,” Hannibal said, his attempts to regain his composure obvious. Will just nodded, trying to get his racing heart back under control. Despite their agreement, they each stole more kisses, quick little things, unable to let go of each other. Will quickly realised that for all of Hannibal's self-control, it was going to be up to him to finally get them out of the car. He raised his hands to Hannibal's face, shifting to kiss his forehead as he rested his palms on Hannibal's cheeks.

“We should get out of here,” he whispered to the breathless man before him, gently pushing him back into his seat. He took a moment to settle himself, facing forwards once more, his eyes closed, then turned to climb out of the car. It was clear to him now that he wasn't going to be able to leave this man. He was addicted. Worse. He was so completely a part of him now that to be rid of him would be like cutting an arm off. More than that; like removing an organ that he couldn't do without.

It was a minute or two longer before Hannibal himself exited the car, only the faintest of flushes to his cheeks giving any indication of how pulled apart he had just been. Will could only hope that he looked as collected as Hannibal did. He waited while Hannibal circled the car and stepped towards him, reaching up to smooth an errant curl that Will hadn't noticed was out of place.

“There's not much point,” he said, “it'll be fighting its way free before we reach the end of the path.” He grabbed at Hannibal's hand as he withdrew it, not willing to let go of that contact just yet. “But thank you.”

Hannibal merely inclined his head in acknowledgement. Will finally let go of his hand, and they both turned to go. It was only a short walk, Hannibal guiding Will with a possessive hand to the base of his back into a restaurant. Even from the outside it looked like somewhere Will would normally never even acknowledge, let alone actually enter. Then again, his usual choices were either burgers or pizza joints, so that wasn't exactly saying a lot. It became clear that Hannibal however was very familiar with the place, and they were just as familiar with him.

“Welcome, Doctor Lecter,” the maître d' greeted them, immediately turning to lead them to their table. Hannibal thanked the man before dismissing him while Will looked around. The restaurant was quiet, though full, their table positioned so as to be separated from most of the other people there, but visible to all. They were on display, and Hannibal was using that display to further his possessive touches, a hand to his shoulder as Will sat, an ever so brief brush of the fingers as Hannibal took his own seat. Will preened under the attention, knowing without being told that this was Hannibal's way of introducing Will to his world, and introducing his world to *him*.

The turning heads that surrounded them told Will all he needed to know. These people were all known to Hannibal, and he watched as Hannibal inclined his head towards a particular table. He wasn't entirely surprised to see Bedelia du Maurier seated at that table, though he was *very* surprised to see Alana and Margot sitting with her, along with a few others he had never met.

“Did you know they would be here?” he asked Hannibal, perversely delighted at the look of faint astonishment on Alana's face.

“This is a common gathering ground for a particular group of people so I am unsurprised, but no, I did not know they would be. Does it bother you?”

“No, not at all. It's...” he trailed off with a half laugh, shaking his head slightly. “It's kind of nice, to see people surprised to see me in a place like this, with someone like you.”

“Seeing you as you deserve to be seen,” Hannibal said, his hand sliding forward to brush his fingers against Will's again. It was only the smallest of contact points, but the jolts of electricity it sparked made Will shiver despite the warm temperature. He glanced across at Alana again, to find her and Margot with their heads together, doubtless discussing him. Bedelia hadn't moved, a thoughtful look on her face as she slowly lifted a wine glass to her lips.

“I wonder if you would grant me one small indulgence while we're here tonight, Will.”

Hannibal interrupted Will's observations, his voice returned to normal finally.

“Yeah. I mean, sure,” Will stammered, suddenly drawn back into himself.

“Allow me to order for you?”

Will smiled in relief.

“I'm...yeah. I don't think I would know where to start with this menu,” he said, genuinely pleased to not have to think about this. Hannibal smiled, and looked across at the maître d' who immediately signaled a waiter. He approached them within seconds, and began a rapid fire conversation in French with Hannibal, of which Will could only make out every second word. The waiter gave a small bow and withdrew, leaving them to their devices again.

“Duck?” he said, hazarding a guess, and was rewarded with a pleased smile.

“Indeed,” Hannibal answered, his obvious delight at Will's understanding even a small part of what he was saying filling Will with unfettered joy. He wondered idly if this was how his dogs felt when he congratulated them on something, then immediately felt embarrassed that he had just compared himself to his *dogs*, like he was some sort of pet.

He did miss them, missed having them around when he went to sleep and then when he woke up, but he'd been to see them every day that they'd been in the kennel, so it wasn't as bad as it could have been. He was due to pick them up tomorrow, and while he was over the moon about that, he could already feel the ripping, tearing sensation that leaving Hannibal was going to cause him.

“Will? Is something wrong?”

Hannibal sounded concerned, his face an appropriate visage of interest mixed with worry. Will realised that he had let his feelings surface a little too far, and he forced a smile back onto his face.

“Yeah, I'm fine. This is good.”

“You needn't feel you must maintain appearances with me, Will. If something is bothering you, I'd rather you tell me so we can do something about it, rather than paper over it and let it worsen.”

Will sighed, rubbing a hand over his face.

“I just don't want you to get scared off, or anything like that,” he offered, half hoping that Hannibal would drop it, but half hoping he dragged it out of him.

“If you'd rather not tell me, I won't force you to,” Hannibal said. He looked almost disappointed, but he hid it well. Just not well enough for Will not to be able to tell. “But you should know, nothing you say could possibly scare me off,” he continued, his tone turning fond.

Will searched his face for a moment, though what for he couldn't say. Whatever it was, he didn't find it, and that resulted in the tension he was feeling leave him, his shoulders slumping slightly.

“I'm just,” he started, not quite sure how to word what he was wanting to say without it sounding like he was being overly clingy. “I've really liked this week. A lot.”

He stopped again, took a drink of the water they'd been given upon sitting. It helped, to wet his mouth before finally just blurting out what he wanted to say.

“It's going to hurt, more than it should, to go back home. I miss my dogs, and I want them back, but I'm going to miss waking up next to you, too.”

He looked away, suddenly uncertain of himself, but entirely certain that for all that Hannibal had said that Will couldn't scare him off, he'd done just that. The fingers that grasped his, however, tugged him back, Hannibal holding on to both of his hands tightly.

“I'm glad I'm not the only one,” he said quietly. Will's head snapped back around, and found no lie on Hannibal's face, only pure want. Will squeezed Hannibal's hands in return, and the moment was only broken by the polite cough from the waiter with their dinners. They separated while the dishes were placed before them, Will amazed as the smells that drifted towards him, his stomach rumbling in forgotten hunger.

“I hope you don't mind, I only ordered mains for us. I have dessert at home, and I don't want to stay here too long.”

“I don't mind at all,” Will said, staring at the food before him. The fact that this could be something Hannibal had made in his own kitchen just went to show how *good* his cooking was. Another thing Will was going to miss.

They ate quickly, but with pleasure, Hannibal explaining in his usual detail what exactly Will was eating (in this case, duck legs with figs, star anise and squash), and how he would make it if Will ever wanted to have it again. Will thought he very much would, if only for the excuse to come and watch Hannibal cook again.

All too soon they were done, and Hannibal excused himself for a moment, leaving Will at the table. He looked across at Alana who didn't notice him, enraptured by Margot as she was. He wondered if that was how he and Hannibal looked to others. The two of them were plainly in love, each face lighting up as they saw each other, and at times it looked as though they were in their own private bubble where nothing and no one existed apart from them. It was certainly how Will felt sometimes, when he was with Hannibal. More often than not, really.

“Hey, Will.”

The slow drawl of Matthew Brown's voice brought Will thudding back to earth, and he felt his skin crawl when he turned to see the man standing right next to him.

“Matthew,” he said, his voice as flat and even as he could manage. “What are you doing here?”

“Oh, I was just in the area,” he said, moving to flop himself down in Hannibal's seat. Anger seethed in Will and he clenched his jaw in an effort to keep it under control. “I saw you here,

so thought I'd come and say hi. We're going to be working together a lot from now on, I hear."

"Yes we are."

Will could scarcely believe the audacity of the man, coming in to interrupt was must obviously be a date. He looked around, trying to see if Hannibal was on his way back, but Matthew had positioned himself in such a way that his view to the bathrooms was blocked. Instead he tried to make eye contact with Alana, but she was just as engrossed in whatever her conversation with Margot as she was before. Bedelia looked between him and Matthew, but seemed less than inclined to help. If anything she looked amused, and indeed, when she saw Will looking she raised her glass to him before turning away.

"Fancy place for you to be, isn't it?"

Will looked back at Matthew, his irritation growing to all new levels. He sat back, his fists subconsciously tightening as he folded his arms across his front.

"Why are you here, Matthew? I'm a bit busy, as you can probably see."

"You looked lonely," Matthew answered with a smirk. "I thought you could do with some company."

Will closed his eyes, counting to ten before he did something he would regret. When he opened them again it was to see Hannibal looming over Matthew, who had yet to notice his return. Ugly anger marred Hannibal's features until he could smooth them back, and Will knew the demonstration was for him and him alone.

"Mr Brown. How unexpected to see you here."

Hannibal's voice was cold and controlled, and anyone with any sort of self preservation instinct should have been sent running upon hearing it. Matthew did not.

"Oh hey, Doctor Lecter," he said, tipping his head back to see who was behind him. "I was just saying to Will that he looked lonely, sitting here all by himself. I can't imagine why anyone would leave him here alone like this."

"He is left alone because he is his own man, who is controlled by no one. As am I."

To Will the underlying threat was unmistakable, but again Matthew seemed incapable of heeding, or even picking up the warning.

"Maybe you should keep a closer eye on him," Matthew said, and Will could almost see the noose tightening around his neck the more he spoke. "He could go running off with anyone, if you don't pay him the attention he deserves."

"I am not a thing to be bartered," Will snapped. "And you can rest assured, Matthew, even were I not with Hannibal, I most certainly would not be interested in *you.*"

Matthew sat straighter, his face thoughtful, before standing.

“I'll see you at work on Monday, Will,” was all he said, then he sauntered his way out of the restaurant.

“Are you okay, Will?” Hannibal asked quietly, moving to stand next to Will, laying his hand on his shoulder.

“Yeah,” Will said, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “Can we...can we just go home now though? I'm not sure I want to be around other people anymore.”

“Of course.”

Hannibal held out a hand for Will to take, helping him out of his chair, before moving that hand to the small of Will's back. They moved towards the front door, Will very aware of the looks they were getting. In his mind they were all Matthew, watching every move he took and he couldn't stop the shudder that ran through him.

He stayed close to Hannibal until they reached the car, allowing Hannibal to once again open his door for him. He felt better once they were within the confines of Hannibal's Bentley. Hannibal didn't say anything as he got in and began driving, choosing instead to just reach across and hold Will's hand in a reversal of the way they had arrived. It was only as they pulled back in to Hannibal's driveway that either of them spoke.

“I am not comfortable with you going back to your house alone after that, Will.”

Hannibal's voice was quiet, strained. Will couldn't help but agree with him. He leaned across the centre of the car, resting his head on Hannibal's shoulder. It was hardly comfortable, but it made him feel better.

“Are we really going to deal with him?” he said, unsure just how scared he was to hear the answer.

“It is entirely up to you, my dear Will,” Hannibal answered, twisting his head to press a kiss to the top of Will's head. “We can deal with the police, if you find that preferable.”

Will sighed, his head spinning. Talking like that after a night of sex, his body blissfully relaxed and flooded with endorphins was one thing. Talking about it after the harsh realities of the situation they were dealing with was something else entirely. And yet...

It was a thought that he hadn't let go of, at all. It wasn't Matthew, as such. It was an idea that spoke to something down deep inside him, something he had kept caged, something that bayed to be let out once it saw a reflection of itself in Hannibal.

“Stay with me longer, Will,” Hannibal whispered. “Until you're safe, at least. We'll find a way to have your dogs with you more often. Just stay with me.”

The almost pleading tone struck Will, and he realised there was no other outcome possible for them. He nodded.

“I'll stay with you. And we'll deal with this together, Hannibal. No one else.”

The creak of leather filled the air as Hannibal pulled Will into his lap, frantic kisses promising the world.

Chapter End Notes

So Easter is coming up, which means that there will be no Friday or Tuesday update since there will be kids running around. I'm gonna try and shift this Friday's one to Thursday, but I don't know if that'll actually happen. Gonna try though!

Thanks you guys, you're all awesome ♥

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

The next morning, part one.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They awoke early Saturday morning, stretching sleep-heavy limbs. They had gone to bed soon after arriving back the night before, kissing and touching, cataloguing each other in every way they had available to them. It hadn't gone any further than that, but the total intimacy they had shared seemed, in Hannibal's mind, to have brought them even closer together, something he was surprised was even possible. Then again, Will had a knack for surprising Hannibal. He certainly hadn't expected the level of territorial possessiveness he had felt at the restaurant on returning from the bathroom to see Matthew Brown lounging in *his* chair, seeing Will so obviously uncomfortable and angry. He would have snapped the man's neck right then and there, had he been able to get away with it.

He took a breath, calming the rage that threatened to rise again. Last night was done, and they had plans – tentative, and Will wasn't entirely aware of any of the details of any of them, but plans all the same – and it wouldn't do to let that rage get in the way of any of it.

Will turned in his arms to face him, sleepy eyes blinking at him. The tenderness Hannibal felt for him was a shock, but not the bone deep need to protect him. He knew Will was more than capable of protecting himself; he wasn't a weak man in any sense of the word, but it made no difference to Hannibal. He would do anything to keep him safe, to keep Will with *him*.

He couldn't resist brushing Will's curls back from his face, tucking the longer strands behind his ears. Will smiled, resting one arm over Hannibal's waist, the other tucked up under his own head.

“Good morning,” he said, his voice still hoarse with sleep. The vulnerability he showed in these early mornings did as much to waken the beast with Hannibal as anything else; a beast that he'd kept hidden from everyone else, but that Will had seen without effort or fear. Hannibal eased its leash just a fraction, rolling suddenly so Will was pinned beneath him, his wrists held tightly above his head in Hannibal's grasp. He rolled his hips down lazily, with no real intent, though the gasp it elicited from Will resulted in a decided increase in interest.

“Good morning, Will,” he answered, leaning down to bite at Will's neck, softly at first, then with increasing pressure, until Will let out a quiet whine that ran its fingers like needles along Hannibal's spine.

“I could get used to waking up like this,” Will said as Hannibal eased the bite, leaning back to examine the indentations left behind. His hips pushed up against Hannibal, the suddenly obvious hardness making it clear how much he had enjoyed the bite. Or maybe it was the restrained wrists. Maybe it was all of it. Whatever it was, it was definitely something Hannibal was looking forward to exploring further. He ground down against Will, savouring the groan it pulled from him, then leaned down to suck Will's earlobe into his mouth, smiling when Will began to wriggle under him. He dragged his teeth over the soft skin between them, giving the ear one last suck before quickly rolling off Will and sitting up. He suppressed a smile as he stood, Will's whine following him as he pulled his sweater on.

“We must always start our day with a good breakfast, Will,” he said, Will trying in vain to grab him and pull him back into bed. It was cruel, perhaps, to work Will up and then leave him, but it was nothing that Will hadn't done to him the night before. And they had all day, after all. The wait, the anticipation, would just serve to make it that much more enjoyable. He left the bedroom and made his way to the kitchen without so much as a look back at Will, the sounds of grumbling and what seemed very likely to be cursing bringing a smile to his face.

He had nearly finished the preparations for breakfast – nothing complicated, vegetables chopped for the omelets and the pan heating for the bacon – when Will came stumbling down the stairs, his hair in disarray and a scowl darkening his face. He had taken the time to pull his boxers on, but was otherwise unclothed.

He really was the most beautiful thing Hannibal had ever seen.

It was still early; far earlier than they had been getting up, even with Will having to work during the week. The faint light filtering through the windows was only just enough to see by, and it made the shadows drape over Will in a way that stole Hannibal's breath. It occurred to him that he hadn't drawn Will at all since they had become better acquainted, and his overpowering desire to do so now stopped him from completing his breakfast preparations.

“What?” Will asked, rubbing his face. It snapped Hannibal out of his staring, looking down at the chopped tomatoes and onions in front of him instead.

“I haven't drawn you for a while,” he answered, opting for honesty. “You look exquisite like this.”

He looked squarely back at Will, enjoying the flush that spread up his neck and across his cheeks. Making Will blush was a truly enjoyable experience, and he didn't hide his smile. Something in it must have said something to Will, because he averted his eyes and rubbed the back of his neck.

“I only just got up. I'm hardly dressed and I hate to think what my hair looks like. Doesn't sound like a recipe for exquisiteness to me.”

“On the contrary, Will. I have yet to see a version of you that doesn't meet that definition.”

And there it was, the full face blush. Hannibal abandoned his cooking for a moment, taking Will in his arms and kissing the top of his head. Will sagged into the embrace, clinging back just as strongly and they stood, pressed together for a few comfortable moments, before

Hannibal moved back to the stove and began cooking the omelets. Once they and the bacon were under way he looked back at Will, now leaning against the centre island. It was a more than appealing sight, and it was very obvious that Will was still in much the same state he had been when Hannibal had left him in bed. That fact pleased Hannibal even more. He didn't hide his appreciation of the view, and once Will noticed he scowled at Hannibal, straightening up only to find that that exacerbated the issue.

“This is your fault, you know,” accused Will, mild irritation in his voice rather than real anger.

“And I must admit to being pleased with my work,” Hannibal said, turning back to the food. Will just huffed, but made no move away, and Hannibal glanced back over at him in triumph. Now finished cooking, Hannibal plated the breakfast and took it over to the breakfast table, Will following behind him. They sat, Will looking particularly happy with what was in front of him.

“How do you do this?” he said after his first bite, narrowing his eyes at Hannibal. “It's eggs and a couple of vegetables. It has no right tasting this good.”

“That would be the secret ingredient,” Hannibal said, wondering if he was being too obvious. It seemed that he wasn't, when Will closed his eyes and chewed his next bite more slowly, obviously trying to work out what he could have put in the food.

“I can't taste it,” he said after a while, looking Hannibal directly in the eye. “Tell me what it is.”

“That I'm afraid I cannot do,” Hannibal said simply, making quick work of his own food. “Once you work out what it is, you can tell me.”

A strange look came over Will's face then, and Hannibal wondered if he had worked out what Hannibal was talking about. If he had, he didn't say anything, and despite himself Hannibal was disappointed. Perhaps even a little hurt. He knew it was irrational, illogical, to feel that way, and yet here he was.

The conversation lulled after that, each man lost to his own thoughts. They finished, and Hannibal stood to clear the dishes as Will spoke.

“I've found a Manchineel tree,” he said quietly, and Hannibal stilled, plates in hand. “It'll take a couple of weeks to arrive. I want to wait until we've got the garden and greenhouse properly set up, but it's ready when we are.”

“Good,” Hannibal said. He was looking forward to this, and the set of Will's body told him that while he was apprehensive, he too was excited. In combination with everything else, this would certainly make sure Matthew learnt his lesson.

“Are you prepared for this, Will?” he asked gently, giving Will one more opportunity to change his mind.

“Before last night? No. The more I've been thinking about it, the more I've talked myself out of it. After last night? I'm prepared.”

He looked up at Hannibal, ran his hand down Hannibal's thigh.

“More than prepared. I want to do this.”

“Good,” Hannibal breathed, leaning down to kiss Will in his chair. “We will get started once the tree arrives. We have much planning to do.”

“But before that,” Will said, pulling his head away from Hannibal. He gently tugged on one of Hannibal's hands, guiding it to the table so he could put the plate down. Once done, he moved the hand lower, until it reached the bulge between his legs. “You have something else to take care of.”

Hannibal put the rest of the dishes down then pulled Will up until they were standing before one another.

“Let us fix that then,” he said, pulling Will in for a kiss.

Chapter End Notes

GUESS WHAT THE SECRET INGREDIENT IS (hint: it's not people). Hannibal is a sap.

I've chopped this chapter in half because of easter weekend kinda throwing a spanner in the works. Next update (and next half of the chapter) will be up next Friday. At this stage I'm planning on merging the second half of this chapter with the entirety of the next, so fingers crossed that all works out :D

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal reach their own consciously recognised conclusions, and Will makes a discovery.

Chapter Notes

This is a blend of the second half of last week's chapter (that was cut short because of circumstance), and the entirety of today's chapter. I hope you enjoy it :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They lay on the bed, Will resting his head on Hannibal's bare shoulder, Hannibal running his fingers idly through those dark curls that he was so fascinated by.

“Every time I think it can't possibly get better,” Will said, breaking the long comfortable silence they had been sharing, “it does.”

Hannibal smiled at that, a small laugh huffing out in response.

“It does,” he answered. “I wonder how you do that.”

“I don't think it's anything to do with me,” Will murmured, his fingers scratching slowly along Hannibal's chest. “I've definitely never had sex like that before. With anyone.”

Hannibal pressed a kiss to the top of Will's head, closing his eyes at the soft scritch-scratch of Will's fingernails trailing across his skin.

“Our meeting was serendipitous,” he eventually answered. “It is chemistry. A bad combination can lead to nothing at best, or disaster at worst. Mix the correct elements together, and you have the potential to change the world.”

“Are you saying the two of us together are world-changing, Hannibal?”

Will propped himself up on his elbows as he spoke, looking down into Hannibal's eyes. He looked amused.

“With you next to me, I feel like we could achieve anything we set our minds to,” Hannibal replied. “And I don't think I could separate myself from you if I tried.” And it was true. He'd never felt like he was missing anything in his life, but meeting Will, drawing him in like this

made everything that had come before him seem a pale, washed out facsimile of an existence. It was not a state of being he was particularly interested in returning to.

Another of those odd looks came over Will's face, one that Hannibal could not interpret no matter how he tried. It was the same as the one he'd gotten when they had been discussing breakfast earlier. His hand came up to caress Hannibal's face, quieting the nerves that had suddenly sprung up deep within him.

“If you had any idea,” Will breathed, and though Hannibal waited for the rest of the sentence it never arrived. Instead Will leaned back down where he had been, head on Hannibal's shoulder and hand splayed across his chest, though now he curled one leg over Hannibal's thighs to hold him in place. Hannibal just tightened his grip on Will in return, breathing him in and marvelling over whatever set of fate and circumstance had conspired to bring this man into his life.

“How did...” Will began, pausing for a brief second before continuing. “How did you know I would be … *open* … to your - *our* idea of what to do about Matthew?”

Hannibal stilled at the sound of Will's voice, as close to unsure and tremulous as he had ever heard from him. He only remained still for a moment, thinking, before resuming his aimless stroking of Will's hair and skin.

“When I first saw you, I was enchanted by your physical beauty,” he said, starting slowly. “I heard you interacting with others some time later, and it was clear to me that you possessed a sharp mind, a wholly different way of thinking than anyone else I had ever come across. A way of thinking that was possibly similar to my own.”

“You got that from some conversations with people about plants?” Will interrupted, scepticism written plainly across his face.

“Indeed I did,” Hannibal said with a smile, dragging his lips lightly across Will's upturned forehead. “You had a way of making connections in conversation that could throw other people, and showed insight into things most others would never even notice.”

Will huffed a little at that, clearly still not understanding despite his ability to form those connections.

“What made me think your way of thinking was more like mine than I had ever thought to find anywhere in the world,” Hannibal continued, “was when I mentioned the fate of my patients. You showed genuine empathy for me, expressing your sorrow, but you couldn't hide the way your interest spiked. I think, even then, you knew on some level what had really happened.”

He took a breath, unsure whether to continue. But to keep Will he knew that honesty would be the only thing that would do, no matter how risky it may appear to be. He knew Will well enough now that it would be much easier to work through an uncomfortable truth, than to claw back any ground lost to lies, whether outright or by omission.

“I could see the way it excited you.”

The words floated in the air between them, and Hannibal held his breath as he waited to see which way Will would react. He could see how he had kept that side of himself locked away, could see how deeply buried it had been until Matthew Brown had given him the means to uncover it. He could bolt like a frightened animal, leaving Hannibal with the difficult job of trying to woo him back, while keeping him safe from Matthew. He could just as easily accept what Hannibal had said though, leaving the way clear for them.

What Hannibal *hadn't* expected was for Will to start laughing. And it wasn't just a light chuckle, either. Will curled up further as his laugh grew louder, then softer as he ran out of breath, tears trickling from his eyes and he buried his face into Hannibal's skin as though in an effort to keep the laughter from escaping. Hannibal just smiled in bemusement, waiting for the laughter to die down. Eventually, it did.

He waited for Will to regain his breath once more.

“While I can't pretend to understand your mirth in this instance,” he murmured into Will's hair, “I can't deny that your laugh is one of the most pleasing sounds I've ever had the privilege of hearing.”

Will's face changed then, shifting from appearing still on the edge of laughter, to all soft light and quiet seriousness.

“How do you do that?” he asked.

“Do what?” Hannibal replied, still just as confused by Will's quickly shifting emotions.

“Say things that I didn't even know I needed to hear.”

Hannibal shifted, wriggling out from under Will so they could lie face to face. It had been such an innocuous, truthful, spur of the moment comment from him and he couldn't quite fathom *why* it seemed to mean so much to Will, only that it did. He resolved to compliment him on more things from now on, for no particular reason. The way it affected him was affecting Hannibal just as strongly. For now he just smiled at Will, pulling him in closer so their bodies were touching everywhere they could possibly touch before they both closed their eyes.

“Tell me,” he whispered, their lips so close but not yet touching. “What was so funny about what I said that it made you cry?”

“You're so sure, almost arrogant at times. You're always so sure about *everything*. What would you say if I said you were wrong, that I wasn't excited about what you did?”

Hannibal turned the thought over in his head, pulled out the memory of that night. He wasn't wrong, and he knew it.

“I'd say you were lying. Others may not have noticed, but I recognised your reaction as surely as if I were looking into a mirror.”

Fingers slid up his skin as he spoke, tightening almost painfully as he finished. He already knew he was right, but that response confirmed it.

“Do you feel guilty?” Will asked, relaxing his fingers but not letting go at all. Their noses brushed, lips still not touching. Hannibal let his hands wander over Will's back, their bodies sated but still seeking more of each other, always more, more, more.

“I try not to feel guilty about anything,” he answered with a smile, pushing forward to finally claim those lips. Will kissed him back softly before pulling back, just a few inches, but enough to break the kiss. Hannibal opened his eyes to find Will watching him, face inscrutable.

“I'm glad you're here with me,” he finally said, gaze shifting to something open and honest. “I'm still not sure quite how we ended up here, talking about killing over breakfast then having the most amazing sex of my entire life,” Hannibal preened over the comment, and had to agree wholeheartedly, “but I'm glad you're here.”

“As am I,” agreed Hannibal. He was truly beginning to forget what it was like to be an autonomous individual, not connected in any meaningful way to anyone else. They had been together such a short time, he and Will, and yet he knew now, and accepted, that he was completely and utterly lost to love.

“That said,” continued Will, his tone belying any apprehension the words themselves may have caused. “I need to pick my dogs up today. It's not fair on them to keep them in a kennel any longer, and I miss them.”

Truth be told, it was an aspect of Will that appealed profoundly to Hannibal. He had no great love for dogs, and had no desire to have any of his own, but it was his love for them that separated Will from any garden variety potential killer. If Will could be brought to do this – and Hannibal firmly believed that he would – it would be different. The violent, uncouth types like the late Mason Verger were a dime a dozen. Someone with such intense feelings and yet the same capacity for violence that Will had, no matter how deeply hidden, was a rare thing indeed. It was the multitude of facets to Will's personality that made him so completely perfect to Hannibal.

“But I don't want to leave you,” Will whispered, interrupting Hannibal's musing thoughts. “I know they can't come here, but I don't want to leave you. And not just because of Matthew,” he added, all levity having left his voice. “If Matthew had never happened, if we were never in this position, I would still find it impossible to leave you.”

He spoke with raw honesty, his face open and without guile, and Hannibal felt another piece of himself fall towards Will.

~*~*~

They reached the kennel after a lazy lunch, followed by a trip back to Will's house to pick up his car. Much to Will's surprise, Hannibal had offered to help him bring the dogs home, despite the huge amount of driving involved for him. Once the dogs were all loaded into Will's car, Hannibal had left him to settle the bill while he went to collect some groceries. Not

only was he insistent on helping Will get the dogs resettled, but he had been equally insistent on making dinner. Will waved him off, watching until the car was out of sight. The physical pull he could feel as Hannibal drove further away was disturbing, and he hurried back into the kennel.

He emerged back into the sunlight, the car full of dogs in front of him. They were all well behaved, sitting quietly in the back, and he grinned at the thought of having them back again. He was just as excited to see how they would react to Hannibal.

He was just about to climb into the car when a voice called out to him in greeting. He looked up to see Alana walking towards him, a smile lighting up her face.

“Will! What are you doing here?”

“Just picking up my dogs,” he said, gesturing to the car. “I've had to keep them in here the last week, and now we're heading back home.”

“Hey there, guys!” She bent down to look through the window, pressing her hand to the glass and smiling through at the dogs. They liked Alana, had always been very excited on the rare occasions she had come to his house on a friendly visit.

“So what are you doing here?” Will asked. He wasn't in a particular hurry, sure that Hannibal would be taking his time with the groceries and strangely eager to not arrive home too much earlier than Hannibal.

“Oh, you know. Just out and about. Killing time until Margot gets out of a meeting.”

“She has meetings on a Saturday?” Will asked, wondering what exactly could be so important.

“The problems with being the head of an empire. You're expected to be able to sort out any and every problem at the drop of a hat,” Alana replied, looking a little wistful as she spoke of Margot.

“So things are going well with you two then?”

“Yeah. They really are,” she answered, that smile brightening her face once again.

“I'm glad,” Will smiled, and he really did mean it. It was nice to see Alana so happy.

“Which leads me to a question that's been tormenting Margot and I since last night,” she continued, and Will knew exactly where she was going with it. He found himself strangely impatient to hear the question so he would have the chance to talk about Hannibal. He just nodded, indicating to Alana that she could ask away, and the smile that came to his face was entirely unbidden.

“You and Hannibal. I knew you knew him, but I didn't know you *knew* him.”

Will just shrugged, the smile growing bigger rather than fading.

“Are you sure it's a good idea, getting involved with him like that?”

Alana voiced the question gently, but it didn't stop Will's mood from souring slightly.

“I don't mean to pry, or meddle, or anything like that, but I know him, and I know you, and...”

She stopped, looking unsure about how to continue.

“And what, Alana?” Will said, more harshly than he had intended. “I'm unstable and he's not? He's a psychiatrist and I'm just taking advantage? Or is it him who's taking advantage of me?”

“No!” Alana exclaimed, her eyes growing wide. “I didn't mean that at all. It's just that you both move in such different circles. And Hannibal can be … kind of intense, even at the best of times. I've never seen him look at anyone the way he was looking at you, last night though.”

Her face softened even further at that last sentence, and Will immediately felt guilty for taking out his previously unrecognised insecurities on her. He took a breath, releasing the tension as he let it back out again.

“How about we start again and pretend I didn't word that in the most spectacularly bad way ever?” smiled Alana, running a hand briefly up Will's arm. He just nodded.

“I'm really happy for you, Will. Hannibal is … well, I'm sure you don't need me to tell you what a great guy he is. “

Will smiled properly this time, beginning to relax again. He knew Alana meant well, and was just attempting to look out for him. It was something she had always been prone to doing, right from the time they had first met, and Will wondered if maybe that was part of the reason he had been drawn to her once he and Molly had divorced. It made him examine the completely different way that Hannibal treated him. They were very much equals, and while Hannibal had a self-confessed protective urge when it came to Will, he was also enthusiastic, to say the least, about Will protecting himself.

“He is,” he answered simply. In every possible way, he knew it to be true, regardless of what others might think of Hannibal's less than public thoughts and tendencies. He was seized by the overpowering urge to see Hannibal, to touch him and make sure that he was real.

“I hate to be rude, Alana, but I've really got to get these guys home.”

“Of course!” Alana exclaimed, stepping back from him. “I'm sorry. Seeing you last night, I didn't realise you had even been away. You must be eager to get home.”

“I haven't been,” Will answered, not sure how evasive he should be, or if he should just tell her like he wanted to. His hesitance was more to do with being unsure about whether Hannibal would want him to tell everyone, until he remembered that the whole point of Hannibal taking him out the night before was to show him off.

He definitely would not want Will to hide their relationship.

“I've actually been staying at Hannibal's all week,” he said, smiling at the way Alana's eyebrows shot up. “There was a situation that meant I had to stay away from my house, and Hannibal offered to have me.”

Alana quickly masked her surprise.

“Well, I better let you go then. I hope everything works out for you, Will. With your dogs *and* with Hannibal.”

Will just nodded and smiled, watching as Alana walked away.

It was the strangest thing, that talking to Alana should make crystal clear something Will already knew, but had yet to explicitly acknowledge to himself.

He was in love with Hannibal Lecter.

~*~*~

The talk Will had had with Alana had not taken up much time, and certainly not enough to stop him from arriving back at Wolftrap before Hannibal did. He wondered if Hannibal was going to find the place easily, but he struggled to think of Hannibal ever getting lost. He let the dogs out of the car, and watched them as they bounded off, overjoyed to finally have the freedom to run as far as they wanted to.

He lost track of time, just standing out in the chilled freedom of his house, watching the dogs frolic and play and lose themselves entirely to their surroundings. It reminded Will of all the reasons why he had moved there, and more importantly *stayed* there, even when moving closer to Baltimore would have been so much easier. But where he had always felt content, he now felt the itch of something missing, something that was incomplete.

He was under no illusions as to what that might be.

When the sound of tyres on gravel travelled towards them, and the dogs abandoned their play in favour of their curiosity, Will felt the empty space in him begin to recede, closing entirely by the time that elegant and wholly impractical-to-be-in-Will's-life car stopped. Hannibal stepped out and Will's breath caught, and before he knew what was happening his feet had pulled him forward until they were standing before each other. Wordlessly, Hannibal tilted his head, just enough to align their lips and kissed Will softly, their bodies pressing together without either man's conscious control.

“So this is the home of Will Graham,” Hannibal all but whispered when they finally parted.

“This is it,” Will replied, whistling to his dogs as they crowded closer. He could see the way they were itching to jump up to greet Hannibal, and while Will doubted he would get too angry over being covered in muddy paw prints, it was still the polite thing to do.

Although being covered in mud *would* have given him the perfect excuse to remove all those layers from Hannibal's body. Instead he helped Hannibal pull packed paper bags from the car

and carry them inside.

“How much did you get? Are you preparing us for an imminent zombie apocalypse?” he asked, hefting one of the heavier bags higher into his arms.

“You've been away for a week, Will. Any food you left in your cupboards will surely need restocking by now.”

Will decided not to correct Hannibal's assumptions that his cupboards *weren't* just full of canned and dried goods, things capable of lasting much longer than just a week. He'd work that out for himself soon enough. They made their way to the front door, Will almost shyly pulling out his keys to let them in. It had been so long since he'd had anyone here.

He could *feel* the way Hannibal was looking around and he placed the bags on the table, taking in the clutter, the bed that Will hadn't got around to making yet that lay in the living room, the fly fishing equipment...*all* of it. It was so very different to the way Hannibal himself lived, and Will was overcome with the urge to try and explain himself.

“Sorry, it's a mess in here, I know it's nothing like they way you -”

He was cut off by a fierce kiss, and he nearly dropped his own bags.

“There is no need to explain yourself to me, Will,” Hannibal said huskily. “Your life is your life, and you live it however you see fit. This is almost exactly how I had pictured your own space,” he continued, looking around the room.

“Even the bed?” Will asked.

“Perhaps not the bed,” Hannibal said. “It's positioning does make things more convenient, though.”

The mix of thoughtfulness and simmering lust on his face caused Will to break out in goosebumps.

“What did you do with the picture of you I left?”

Will blinked at the abrupt subject change, his confusion apparently plain to Hannibal.

“I only ask because it has been so long since I have drawn you, and I would very much like to again. To see you where you feel most comfortable is a singularly pleasing experience. If you didn't keep it, I won't be offended. I understand that it was a more bold move than you would have been used to.”

Will let out a light laugh and moved towards his desk. He hadn't taken the picture out, hadn't so much as looked at it since he had put it in there, but he was always very aware of its presence.

“I kept it,” he said as he moved, suddenly very excited to see it again. He had thought it had overly flattered him when he first saw it – recognisably him, but a far more put together, attractive version of himself. At the time he had thought it was some level of over-

theatricality on Hannibal's part, but as they had become closer to one another, he was beginning to believe that maybe, that was just how Hannibal saw him.

He opened the drawer and began rifling through the papers, frowning when he couldn't find it. Maybe he'd put it in another draw.

He knew he hadn't.

He searched anyway, becoming increasingly concerned when it didn't materialise. He finally slammed the drawers shut in mixed frustration, fear, and *anger*. The anger in particular made it's presence known; a black, oily tar, seeping through and staining his insides with its creeping tendrils.

“It's gone,” he said quietly before looking up to meet Hannibal's eyes.

“I know what Matthew took.”

Chapter End Notes

I have to admit this update was particularly difficult to write, and I'm not spectacularly happy with it, but I hope it provides some enjoyment nonetheless ♥

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The rage that Hannibal could see flowing through Will was astounding.

The shadows across his face flitted and flickered with every change of expression, the patterns changing from moment to moment but never into a combination that was anything less than utterly appealing. He could feel his own excitement building with every change in Will's face, with the scent of possessive fury that was flowing from him, with the way that Will's body grew taut with seething anger but never, not once, losing control.

It was beautiful, and it was intoxicating, and it was everything Hannibal had seen within Will, brought to the surface. But now was not the time.

“Will!” he said firmly, drawing Will's attention to him. “Come to me.”

Will straightened back up, his face slowly softening in increments the longer he watched Hannibal. Hannibal kept his own face carefully subdued, relying on Will's tendency to mirror the demeanour of those around him to help bring him back down, to safely cage that anger in a place where he could use it effectively, at the right moment. To his pleasure, Will responded, the tension bleeding out, his hands relaxing from the tight fists they had been balled into. Will was so responsive while remaining his own man, a combination that Hannibal could not get enough of.

Slowly he closed the drawer, their eye contact never breaking, then moved into Hannibal's waiting arms. Hannibal pulled him in close, resting his face against Will's, feeling him relax further. His arms snaked behind Hannibal's back, gripping tightly to his clothes.

“It is unlikely that that was the only thing he took,” Hannibal whispered softly, holding Will tightly.

“I know.”

Hannibal remained quiet, letting Will sort through whatever he might be wanting to say. It didn't take long.

“There's nothing else he could have taken that would make me so angry though.” He took a breath and leaned back, looking Hannibal squarely in the eye again. “I want to kill him. I want to go to him now and take back everything he's taken from me, and I don't just mean the physical picture.”

Hannibal nodded, knowing exactly what Will was referring to, and he listened as Will continued.

“He forced his way into my space. He took something that has more value than just pencil on paper. He took physical proof of my first real memory of you, of *us*. *He's trying to separate us*.”

The quiet venom married with fierce protectiveness in Will's voice all but took Hannibal's breath away. His eyes dropped to Will's lips, pulled back as they were in the echoes of a snarl, teeth just barely showing between them, and he pushed forward for a kiss. Will melted against him, kissing him back just as hungrily, taking as much as he was giving. Hands roamed across bodies, desperate fingers seeking contact, any contact anywhere, until they broke apart suddenly, both panting for air.

“I promise you, Will. He will never succeed in taking you from me, nor me from you.”

Will's fingers searched across Hannibal's face as he watched intently, as though committing every sight, every touch and feeling to memory.

“You are mine,” Will said softly, his tone at odds with the intensity of his expression.

“I am yours,” Hannibal agreed, and he wondered if Will could hear the hidden *I love you* travelling alongside the words.

Will's fingers changed from searching to caressing, stroking the length of Hannibal's face, curling back into the hair behind his ears, then travelling backwards until his arms were wound behind Hannibal's neck. Hannibal let his own arms fall loosely around Will's waist and they remained like that for a moment, searching each other's eyes and both finding what they were looking for.

“And I'm yours,” Will finally whispered, barely able to be heard above the faint snuffling of the dogs, but Hannibal could see that Will meant it in exactly the same way he had. He closed his eyes against the momentary dizziness it caused then finally released Will, stepping back towards the kitchen.

“Let us prepare dinner,” was all he said, but he knew Will understood.

~*~*~

Dinner finished, the two of them relaxed on the bed, hands intertwined. Will had curled up against Hannibal's side, with Hannibal's arm thrown around him, and he had been idly playing with the other man's free hand until he had twisted it, capturing Will's and holding it to his chest. It was quiet, and restful, and somehow entirely different to the time they had spent at Hannibal's house in Baltimore while remaining, at its core, completely the same.

It took Will a moment to realise that the reason for that was because home had changed for him. Home was no longer the planks of wood and accoutrements of life.

It was Hannibal.

He wriggled, trying to press himself just a little bit closer to Hannibal, to breathe him in just that much more.

“Will?”

Hannibal's voice was curious, and amused, and his arm tightened around Will, helping him in his quest. Will just shook his head and burrowed deeper, sighing when Hannibal kissed the top of his head.

“We'll have to start planning what we intend to do with Matthew,” Hannibal said after a few more moments of comfortable silence. It sent another spark of cold rage through Will's core, and he struggled to tamp it down.

“He's going to pay,” was all he said, and Hannibal nodded above him.

“You've been collecting all of your plants?”

It was Will's turn to nod, and said “Everything is ready to go. We're just waiting on the actual ground work to be done.”

“I will speak to Bedelia,” Hannibal murmured. “I'm sure with a small push we can hurry things along. The question is...” and he paused for a moment, as though unsure what he planned to say. Will knew it was just another aspect of his speech patterns, designed to lull others into security and now entirely a habit. Will saw through it, and knew that Hannibal was aware of that. He waited for Hannibal to continue.

“Will you do this quickly, or slowly?”

“I haven't decided. But your suggestion of the Manchineel tree is going to be the crowning point.”

He looked up to see Hannibal smiling, a quiet pride filling his eyes.

“Good,” was all he said, and Will shifted, straddling Hannibal's lap, his hands holding onto the bars of the headboard on either side of Hannibal's head. It was too much, being this close, being this *connected* to someone, and he could feel everything he had ever felt for this man threatening to tear him to pieces. His heart was pounding and he knew what he wanted to do but had no idea if he was capable. He decided to try anyway.

“I love you,” he said, almost breathless in the delivery of the words, and the widening of Hannibal's eyes in surprise and adoration was worth the fear. Fingers tightened on his hips as though someone had punched Hannibal, and for once the lack of words was entirely without thought or planning on Hannibal's part.

“Will,” he breathed. Will could see how there were no words for Hannibal to grasp, and he felt powerful, reducing him to this panting, trembling, wordless state.

“I'm *in* love with you,” Will continued, and he smiled when Hannibal's eyes squeezed shut as though too overwhelmed to cope with any further stimuli. Will took advantage and leaned down, capturing Hannibal's lips in a kiss that he seemed only half aware of, until Will began grinding his hips down onto the burgeoning erection below him. The kiss quickly turned

frantic, almost animalistic, until Hannibal grasped Will's shoulders and shoved him back, not letting go. They stared at one another for a moment longer.

“I'm in love with you too, Will.”

Chapter End Notes

Just a short one today, as a sort of linking chapter. We're getting pretty close to the end of this particular story ♥

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Things are set into motion, and Bev & Will have a chat

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will shuffled into the lunch room, rubbing his eyes. Hannibal had stayed more than just the one night at his house in Wolftrap, and the lack of sleep combined with the early starts were beginning to get to him. He dug around in the fridge to retrieve the chicken salad Hannibal had insisted on making for him – and really, he could get very used to not having to cook, ever – then stood to find Beverly smirking at him from the doorway.

“For someone who looks really good, you look like hell,” she remarked, walking towards him with her own lunch in hand. Will huffed a laugh in response, shrugging slightly as he made his way towards her.

“Late nights, early mornings. You know how it is.”

Beverly just raised her eyebrows with a smile.

“Things still going well with Hannibal, then?”

Will smiled and ducked his head, looking at his lunch.

“Yeah, really well,” he replied, reasonably certain that his face was beginning to be dusted with that pink shade it so often was when he was thinking about Hannibal. If it was, Bev at least had the grace not to mention it. He looked back up to find her looking at him like he was a small puppy that had wandered in out of the rain and was now sitting curled up in front of a fire.

It wasn't too dissimilar to how being with Hannibal made him feel, if he thought about it.

“You know,” Beverly continued, getting up to make herself a coffee, “I was thinking the other day about the first time you mentioned Hannibal coming here, that weird guy who just sat and drew pictures all day. Who would have thought that you'd end up head over heels in love with each other?”

“If I'd known then what I know now about him, I wouldn't have been calling him that weird guy,” he said, half referring to Hannibal the man, and half referring to that darker, hidden part of him that only Will knew about. “Or maybe I would, but I would have meant it differently.”

Beverly made a soft 'awww' sound that Will scowled at, but he couldn't keep up the fake irritation at her. As much as he loved spending time with Hannibal (and oh god, did he wish they could spend even more time together; the constant feeling of having lost a limb whenever they were apart was beginning to get painful), he had missed hanging out with Beverly as often as he had used to. Hannibal seemed to be fond of her, though, so maybe one day they could all go out for lunch together. Or maybe he could get Hannibal to invite her over to one of his dinners. He had mentioned often having dinner parties whenever he felt a tinge of boredom, so perhaps he would be interested in indulging Will at some future point. He only half acknowledged the fact that Hannibal had not had a single one, nor expressed interest in one, since they had been together.

The door slammed open suddenly, Beverly jumping slightly as it did so, and the temperature in the room plummeted. It was a temperature change that had nothing to do with the weather.

Will found himself trying to draw in, while simultaneously fighting to keep himself from standing up and baring his teeth at Matthew, who smirked at the fright the noise had given Beverly. He sauntered in and flopped down into the seat next to Will, Beverly watching in vaguely horrified concern.

“So, Graham,” he drawled. “You ready to start moving in the new collection next week?”

Will blinked, wondering where the conviction in Matthew's voice came from. As far as he knew, things were still a few weeks away from being ready.

“Doctor du Maurier just called me. Seems that guy who keeps hanging around you is pressuring her to move the schedule up, and since he's providing the money...” Matthew shrugged as though saying 'what can you do.' Will closed his eyes and breathed slowly, evenly, restraining every urge that was baying for Matthew's blood. It was harder than it should have been to keep himself under control, and had been since he had discovered the stolen picture.

“It'll just take a phone call,” Will said, keeping his eyes shut and maintaining a flat, even tone of voice. The sound of a chair scraping reached his ears, and he shifted to see Beverly moving to stand between his and Matthew's chairs.

“Hey Will,” she said, very deliberately *not* looking at Matthew. “I've been meaning to ask you for some help. Would you mind coming and checking something out for me? I know it's your lunch break, but it'd be easiest to get it done now.”

Will looked gratefully at Beverly as he stood up, wasting no time in taking her offered escape.

“Sure. Do you mind if I bring this with me?” he said, gesturing at his salad. “Hannibal made it specially for me, and I'd hate to waste it. It's really good,” he continued, looking pointedly at Matthew with the last sentence. If it had any effect on him, he didn't show it.

Beverly walked out of the lunch room, Will trailing in her wake. It was only once they'd gotten closer to her greenhouse that Will spoke.

“Thanks, Bev,” he said quietly, shoving his hands in his pocket. It was definitely getting warmer, the drifts of snow not nearly as widespread or deep as they had been, but it was most assuredly not exactly warm yet, either.

“To be honest, that was as much for Matthew's sake as yours. You looked like you were about to strangle him in his seat,” she answered, the smile in her voice belying any accusation. “Can't say I blame you.”

Will huffed a laugh, but felt no mirth, and ignored the chill that ran down his spine at her words. He followed Bev into the tiny storage room that served as her office in the greenhouse, and slumped down in the spare chair. He was suddenly exhausted, angry at Matthew, and himself, and irrationally angry at Hannibal for indirectly putting him in that position in the first place without even telling him. He knew that wasn't fair though, and he rubbed his face as though that could reset his emotions.

“How are you, Will?” Bev asked, resting a hand on his shoulder.

“You remember that picture of me that Hannibal drew, way back when we first went so you could see him?”

“Yeah,” she answered, clearly unsure what that had to do with anything.

“I didn't throw it away, like I said I did. I kept it.”

Beverly's fingers tightened briefly on Will's shoulder before she let him go, moving to sit in her own chair. Her face had brightened considerably, a knowing smile crossing it.

“I had a feeling you might have,” she said, looking as affectionate as she would if one of Will's dogs had just done something to impress her. He decided not to dwell on the fact that he often felt like a pet around the people closest to him, though in entirely different ways. “So, are you going to bring it in so I can have another look at it?”

Will fidgeted for a moment, unsure if he should tell her or not. He decided he would.

“That's the thing,” he started, stilling his hands by placing them flat on his thighs. “You know how my house got broken into? Hannibal and I went back on Saturday. I hadn't been able to find what was stolen at the time, so I assumed nothing was, but when I went to show Hannibal that I had kept the drawing...”

He trailed off, unsure how best to proceed, but he could see that Beverly had already reached the correct conclusion. She looked both sympathetic, and more than a little concerned.

“And you still think it was Matthew?”

“I *know* it was Matthew, Beverly,” he answered hotly. “I don't have any real proof, but I *know* it was him. He even followed us into this *insanely* upmarket restaurant Hannibal had taken us to on Friday night.”

Beverly looked at him with her mouth open, aghast.

“What, right out in public?”

“Not just in public. Doctor du Maurier was there with Alana and Margot, and he just … strolled right in like he was expected, like he was late to our date.”

He laughed again, just as mirthless as before.

“He even managed to time it so that he was able to sit at our table while Hannibal was in the bathroom.”

“So you think he was following you, actually stalking you?”

“Either that, or he was tipped off,” he said, and immediately stilled. *Would* someone have told Matthew he was there? He shook his head, worried his paranoia was getting to him.

“Jeez, Will,” Beverly said, worry colouring her voice. “I really think it's time you called the police. Or at least complained to the board here. I'm sure if you told them your concerns they'd do something about it.”

Will just shook his head, knowing before she even finished what Beverly was suggesting and knowing equally as strongly that nothing would be done.

“I have no *proof*, Bev. I can't exactly go to them and say he's creeping me out, and that he stole a drawing that I can't even prove actually existed.”

Beverly slumped a little and acknowledged Will's argument. He knew he was right, and also...

...if he went through any official channels, there was no way he and Hannibal would be able to follow through on their plan. To say it would be foolhardy would be an extreme understatement. He shouldn't even be telling Bev this.

“No, I'll just stay doing what I'm doing,” he continued, trying his best to allay Bev's fears. “I have Hannibal with me, and you're my knight in shining armour here, aren't you?” he said with a smile, and was delighted when it was returned.

“You better believe it,” she replied, and just like that the tension left the room. “Just promise me you'll come find me if he gets too weird at work, okay?”

“I will, Bev. Between you and Hannibal, I think I'm safe.”

The same couldn't be said for Matthew though, and Will found himself delighting in that fact.

Chapter End Notes

So I missed the Friday update, but hey, better late than never, right? :D ♥

Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Will makes Hannibal a gift, while Hannibal brings Will some information.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will left work early, and by the time he was nearly home, his irritation with Hannibal had passed. He was certain that Hannibal would have had reason to convince Bedelia to move things along more quickly, and while he would have preferred to have been given a heads up, it wasn't the worst thing he could possibly have done.

He looked across at the flowers lying on the seat next to him – a bouquet he had made himself of white lilies and purple aster, dotted with forget-me-nots and daisies, all of it framed with maidenhair fern. He felt sure, without ever having asked him, that Hannibal would know exactly what all those flowers symbolised. He had toyed with the idea of putting a single rose in the middle, but that would have been making it obvious for even the most blind person, and he wasn't interested in easy. Not when he knew Hannibal wouldn't struggle with this.

As the car pulled up to his house, so gloriously in the middle of nowhere, it became very obvious that Hannibal wasn't there. The house was shut up, the sound of the dogs barking as they heard his car approaching able to be heard clearly. Hannibal's car was nowhere to be found. Will tried not to get too upset – he had no claim over Hannibal's free time, no more than Hannibal had over his, but he still felt an irrational stab of abandonment in his chest.

He clambered out of the car, careful to keep the bouquet as safe as possible. Even though Hannibal wasn't there so Will could give it to him as a surprise, he still have every intention of giving them the second Hannibal walked through that door. In another life he might have been second-guessing himself now; asking himself whether he was being too forward, too fast, misreading things, but there was another side effect of being with Hannibal.

He was suddenly so much more confident in himself.

He knew Hannibal loved him. He knew that he loved Hannibal in return, and that Hannibal wanted that love as much as Will himself did. They were perfect, Will knew that, and more importantly, he was *proud* of it. And this was a feeling he had never had before – not even with Molly. If anything, his marriage to Molly was serving to highlight all the things that were *right* about what he had with Hannibal. It wasn't that he didn't love Molly, he did, but it was so different. By the end it was painfully clear to both of them that while the love was still

there, it had changed to more of a sibling bond. There was no spark, and no drive to find it again.

And if Will was being honest with himself, he wasn't sure that the spark had ever really been there for him. Molly was warm, and Molly was comfortable, but Hannibal was passion, and heat, and an all consuming level of love and devotion that he knew was never going to reach an end.

Those thoughts carried him into the house on a cloud of happiness and contentment, two things that he had never, until now, truly realised were separate states of being. The dogs piled around him in greeting, only causing Will's smile to grow even wider. The smell of dinner cooking wafted towards him, his mouth beginning to water, leaving Will in no doubt that Hannibal wouldn't be far away.

He went straight to the kitchen cupboard. He didn't have any vases for the flowers, but he did have several jugs and large jars that would serve just as well. He dug one out, carrying it over to the table where he found a note from Hannibal.

Dearest Will, it began in Hannibal's flowery, cursive script, and Will's ears flushed with heat immediately. He'd never been anyone's dearest anything.

He liked it.

I must apologise for not being here for your return, but an urgent errand came up. Dinner is in the slow cooker, but should need no attention from you. I should be back well in time for dinner, so please wait for me.

Ever yours,

Hannibal.

Will smiled, tracing a finger of the writing. Leave it to Hannibal to be so painstakingly formal in a note left on the table, especially when he included a sentence like 'please wait for me'. That, the 'ever yours' ... they both almost broke Will in two. He rubbed his face, and concentrated on arranging the flowers in the jar. That done, he peeked inside the cooker to see what appeared to be lamb shanks, and he breathed the fragrance in deeply. His stomach growled so he moved away, sure he wouldn't be able to resist the temptation to have a taste. Instead he moved to lie on the bed, gazing idly out the window and scratching at the dogs' heads in turn. Buster curled up next to him, a little bundle of warmth at his side.

They weren't there long, half an hour at most, before the dogs' superior hearing picked up the sound of an approaching car. They sat up, interested at first, and then excited when they – and Will – realised it was Hannibal returning. Will stood, watching the car as it grew closer. He couldn't help himself, walking to the door to watch from the deck, then stepping down to meet the car as it drew to a stop. His smile was so big that it was beginning to hurt, and he found himself walking towards Hannibal faster than he needed to.

Hannibal got out of the car, carrying something in his hand but Will didn't care, didn't care about any of it. He grabbed Hannibal's head almost viciously, pulling him in for a deep,

frantic kiss, one that Hannibal returned with equal enthusiasm.

“Not that I'm complaining,” Hannibal said with a smile when they broke apart, both of them breathless, “but what brought that on?”

“I love you,” Will answered simply, because it was the truth. He still revelled in being able to say it, in being able to touch Hannibal whenever and however he pleased, in just having him by his side.

Hannibal's free hand caressed his cheek, his eyes softening.

“And I love you,” he whispered, leaning in to brush his lips oh so gently across Will's once more. “I have something for you,” he continued, holding up his other hand for Will to see.

Will took the offered piece of paper. He looked questioningly at Hannibal, already sure he knew what it was before he turned it. Hannibal merely nodded, his face an impassive mask but for the twinkle of amusement in his eye. Will turned the page to see, for the first time since he had hidden it away in his desk, the image Hannibal had drawn of him.

“Was this your urgent errand?” Will asked, his fingers trembling ever so slightly. Hannibal nodded, watching Will's face carefully.

“I had hoped to be back before you arrived, but I thought that might have been wishful thinking.”

“I left early,” Will said, his eyes returning again and again to the carefully drawn lines, the way his own face, so much more beautiful than the one Will saw every morning in the mirror, peered back out at him with a coy expression. “Where did you get this?”

“I retrieved it from the man who took it from you.”

Will looked sharply at Hannibal, hearing the way the words framed a space that was deliberately left unspoken.

“Did he know you were there?”

Hannibal shook his head, the movement only slight.

“Then what aren't you telling me?”

“My dear Will,” Hannibal murmured, his hands raising again to frame Will's face. “Always able to see right through me.”

“Just tell me,” Will said through the flush that surged through him at Hannibal's words, trying his best to maintain his gruff tone but acutely aware that he sounded more breathless than stern.

“I've asked Bedelia to move construction on the new garden forward,” began Hannibal, his eyes dropping briefly to the ground.

“I know. I heard from *Matthew.*”

“I'm sorry I couldn't have let you know first, but time is now a factor, Will.”

“Why, what did you find?” Will was concerned now, more concerned than he had been.

“What can only be described as a shrine, and not a pleasant one at that.”

Will stood still, vaguely aware of the dogs milling around them. He felt like he should have questions, and yet he couldn't think of a single thing to say to Hannibal. Instead, he remained silent, waiting for Hannibal to continue.

“There are photos of you in a locked cupboard in his basement, the same cupboard in which I found the sketch I made. Some of those photos are with me, outside my house, some of them here. Some have been … *defaced.*”
“Here? He's been watching us *here*?”

Roiling anger surged through Will, and he instinctively began searching the property for any signs of Matthew.

“Come inside, Will. He isn't here now. I made sure to keep track of him. Bedelia, despite herself, has him wrapped up in a planning meeting tonight.”

“I wasn't aware of any -”

“I specifically requested that you be exempted from this meeting, for this very purpose.”

“Jesus, Hannibal.”

Will stepped back, running a hand through his hair.

“I'm sorry, Will.”

That was enough to have Will grabbing on to Hannibal again. He sounded genuinely sorry, as though *he* had failed Will in some manner, and Will couldn't bear it. He rested his head on Hannibal's shoulder, relaxing into the strong grip of his lover.

“What are we going to do?” he whispered.

“What we had always planned. We just have to move earlier than expected. Can you have the tree here by Tuesday?”

Will nodded. He could have the tree here by tomorrow, if he really needed to. Next week wouldn't be an issue.

“You already have Datura Stramonium?”

Will nodded again, relaxing further as they began their planning in earnest. He knew *exactly* what he would be doing with the Datura, and how to do it.

“Excellent. We'll start with that this week, and move on to the crescendo next week, once we have the Manchineel tree.”

They stood in silence for a moment longer, wrapped in each other's arms and their own thoughts, then followed the dogs inside. Despite everything, Will had not forgotten his gift, and he excitedly pulled Hannibal to the table by the hand.

“Did you make this?” he asked, his eyes taking in every single flower.

“Yeah,” Will answered, suddenly shy. He might know flowers, but he was no florist and had only the rudimentary basics of how to put together a bouquet. Hannibal remained silent, and the longer he went without speaking, the more Will's previously unshakeable confidence began to falter. He was just about to begin justifying himself, apologising for the lack of finesse, when Hannibal finally turned to him.

“I love you too, Will,” he said, his voice so soft Will could only just hear it. “More than you could possibly know.”

Will smiled just as softly, pleased that he had been right about Hannibal understanding what he was saying. He turned away, and began pulling out the plates and cutlery for dinner. It was time to start planning Matthew's end.

Chapter End Notes

I feel I should very emphatically say here: Do Not Fuck With Datura, Kids. It's not good.

Also, sorry about the late update. Hopefully things are back to their normal schedule :D

Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Will sets the plan into motion

Chapter Notes

Just a warning that things with Matthew getting especially sketchy and kinda gross.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“It's not too late to change your mind, Will.”

They were finishing off their breakfast – Hannibal's omelettes and home made sausages that were equally valued by Will and his dogs – while Will tried to dampen down his excitement. If there was anything that was disturbing him about this entire endeavour, it was his *lack* of disturbance. His attempts to calm himself were apparently having the opposite effect on his appearance, if Hannibal's look of concern was anything to go by.

“Would you be concerned if I said I was actually looking forward to this?” he asked, somewhat shy in his question. He looked at the remains of his breakfast on his plate; the fact that it was nearly cleaned of food was proof enough that he wasn't exactly filled with nerves.

“Not in the slightest,” was the reply, so filled with warmth and indulgence that it caused Will to begin to blush before he even looked up to see Hannibal, gazing at him with completely undisguised devotion. Will smiled in pleasure, inadvertently letting out a small giggle when Hannibal's socked foot nudged his own under the table. He quickly clamped his mouth shut, hoping Hannibal wouldn't tease him about it.

“I had been thinking, though,” he said after shovelling the last of his breakfast into his mouth, “that I'd prefer to start with the foxglove, instead of the datura.”

Hannibal just watched him thoughtfully, holding his half full cup of coffee to his lips. He was clearly waiting for Will to explain, so Will obliged.

“It was already on the list of things to be prepared today anyway, so it'll be easier. It's also less likely to leave him blind for three days. I think the datura should be left until the day itself.”

A shiver of anticipation ran down his spine as he spoke, as though saying it all out loud made it that much more real. He watched as the pleased look on Hannibal's face grew. It always gave him a warm feeling, knowing that Hannibal was happy with him.

“And the other part of today's plan?”

Will's stomach soured at the reminder.

“It's fine,” he said curtly, not wishing to discuss it any further. It was necessary, he knew it was, but it was the only part of the plan that he didn't like. Try as he might though, he couldn't come up with any other idea. It was a last minute addition, only made possible by the things Hannibal had found while he was retrieving the drawing from Matthew's house.

Hannibal put his coffee cup on the table and stood, moving around behind Will. He rested his hands on Will's shoulders, gently massaging them, and Will leaned back into the touch, leaning his head against Hannibal's stomach.

“You don't have to do this, Will. We can find another way.”

Will just shook his head, closing his eyes. He reached his own hands up to hold on to Hannibal's fingers, while the man himself leaned down to kiss the top of Will's head.

“I can do it. I'd rather not, but it's not like I'll have to keep it up for very long, will I?”

He tilted his head, chasing Hannibal's lips, the other man pulling him up as they did so. It was a perfect kiss for this type of morning, Will thought somewhere in the back of his mind. Slow, and warm, no real heat but oh so much comfort. No matter what, it said, they weren't going to lose each other. Will kept that conviction in his mind for the rest of the day.

~*~*~

The early part of the morning had been uneventful enough, but at ten a.m., just as asked, Matthew slithered into Will's office. He closed the door behind him, a smug look on his face, and draped himself over the second chair. Will swallowed his disgust, plastering a thin smile over his face.

“So what can I do for you, Mr Graham?” Matthew asked, his drawl flowing over Will like oil.

“Since we're going to be working so closely over the coming weeks, I thought it best that we get to know each other a little better. Don't you?”

Matthew perked up at that, his eyes flashing with a predatory gleam.

“Won't your Doctor Lecter have a problem with that?” he purred, drawing out the vowels of Hannibal's title with obvious disparagement.

“You don't need to worry a bit about Doctor Lecter,” Will said, catching Matthew's eyes and pushing his voice seductively lower. Matthew hummed a little, his smirk growing wider.

“Trouble in paradise already, is there?”

“You have to have arrived in paradise in the first place for there to be trouble there.”

Will felt dirty, but despite himself he had to admire his acting skills. Hannibal would have been proud of the way Matthew was taking his bait without ever once looking to see if there was a hook attached. Matthew leaned closer, his quickening breath unmistakable even from as far back as Will currently was.

“I'm glad you've seen the light,” he said, trying to match Will's own silky purr. It wasn't working. Will turned his shiver of revulsion into what he hoped looked like one of anticipation, and dropped his hand to the middle of the desk, palm up. As expected, Matthew swallowed the performance whole, sliding his own hand across the wooden surface, then trailing a finger softly across Will's exposed wrist.

“Just how closely do you anticipate us working?” he whispered, his nails now lightly scratching at Will's skin. “Because I've got some ideas, if you catch my drift.”

Without warning his fingers clamped around Will's wrist, digging in tighter and tighter. Will hissed in pain, his eyes closing briefly before fluttering back open. Matthew's grip didn't relax at all; if anything it grew tighter when Will re-established their eye contact. The heat roaring behind Matthew's eyes made Will wonder if he'd made a mistake in courting this attention. It did nothing to lessen his resolve though. If anything, this slight revealing of Matthew's intentions only spurred him on.

“How about we see where your ideas take us?” he managed to spit out, the pain in his wrist growing too great to easily ignore. And yet, the more he failed to hide the pain, the bolder Matthew grew, and the more *amused* he seemed to be. His grip tightened yet again and Will let out a hiss, wondering at what point his bones were going to give up and turn to dust. Matthew just smirked, then abruptly let go, turning Will's hand over in both of his, fingers stroking over tender, already bruising skin.

“I like to label my things,” he said, his soft tone and gentle actions completely at odds with the way the words he used chilled Will to his core. “I hope you don't mind.”

Will could only smile wanly, trying in vain to keep his thumping heart under control. So focussed was he on trying to keep to his plan and *not* stab Matthew with the nearest sharp implement that came to hand, that he barely registered the door to the office opening again – not until he heard Beverly's sharp intake of breath.

“Will?” she asked, uncertainty shaking her voice. “Are you okay?”

Will pulled his hand away from Matthew's, looking guiltily towards his friend. There was no way he could explain this, not in a way that would keep her blissfully unaware of what he was planning, and the dark little core of him delighted in the way his guilt-stricken expression would go just that little bit further towards reeling Matthew in.

Matthew stood before Will could respond to Bev, looking down and licking his lips slowly.

“I'll see you later on, okay Will?” he said, his tongue almost caressing Will's name as it left his mouth. Will had to swallow, the revulsion and echoes of fear turning his stomach. Matthew gave Beverly a knowing grin as he pushed past her and left the office. Bev just stood still, staring at Will as though he'd grown another head.

“What the fuck was that all about?” she asked flatly, before closing the door once again.

“Nothing,” Will answered, hurriedly tugging his sleeve down before she could notice the rapidly darkening marks on his skin.

“Nothing? Because that looked an awful lot like you were holding hands. With *Matthew.* Jesus, Will, what is going on? Yesterday you were acting like you were terrified of him, and now, what. You're cheating on Hannibal with him?”

“No, I'm not cheating on Hannibal, especially not with him!” Will couldn't hide his disgust at the thought.

“Shit, I'm sorry,Will. I know you wouldn't. I just … what is going on here? Is he taking things further? You've gotta come and get someone if he does that, you know that, right?”

Bev looked utterly confused, and concerned, and more than a little worried. It hurt Will, seeing her like that because he *knew* it was entirely because of her love for him, her need to protect him, and he couldn't tell her a damn thing about what he was doing. His shoulders slumped and he scrubbed his hands over his face.

“I asked him to come in here,” he said, deciding on a light version of the truth. “I just figured that since we are going to be working together, it would be best to get everything out in the open and hopefully work through all this now instead of letting it fester.”

He watched Bev carefully, and let out a small sigh of relief when she seemed to buy it.

“Maybe next time don't do that alone, okay, Will? I worry about you.”

“Thanks, Bev. I really don't deserve a friend like you.” Will meant it, completely and utterly. He knew his life was with Hannibal, but he'd be lost without Bev's friendship.

She smiled, her worried expression easing, but not disappearing entirely.

“I know you don't,” she said. “You're just lucky I take pity on you.”

Will laughed out loud at that, tension bleeding away. Between Bev & Hannibal, he knew he was going to get through this just fine. He stilled for a moment, mulling over a decision.

“Hey, Bev? Do you think I could grab some cut foxgloves from your greenhouse? I want to compare colours for the display.”

Bev grinned and nodded.

“Sure thing. You want me to bring them in here?”

“If you could, that'd be great.”

“You're not allergic to them, are you? Just that being in this enclosed space could be problematic, if you are.”

“No, and I'm sure Matthew would have mentioned something when I said we'd be working with them. Here will be just fine.”

Will smiled, his previous fear and lack of control now well and truly settled.

~*~*~

After lunch, Will got to work on the main part of his day's plan for Matthew. He pulled a sealed bottle of water out of the fridge and took it back to his office, where he locked the door then cautiously peeled the bottle's plastic label half back. He rummaged in his bag, looking for the kit Hannibal had put together for him. He found it, and pulled out a long, thick syringe, fitted with a thin needle. He carefully punctured the plastic where the label had been, and suctioned half the water out. It went more quickly than he had anticipated, which helped to ease his nerves.

Once done, he grabbed one of the foxglove vases that Beverly had brought over for him that morning. He refilled his syringe with water from the vase, and pushing the needle back through the same hole he had made, he began refilling the bottle. Once done, he reflattened the label back into its original position, both hiding and sealing the tiny hole he had made. He smiled, pleased with his handiwork. He stood, throwing the bottle in the air and catching it again, before unlocking the door and making his way to the outside gardens.

It was still cold, but the snow had disappeared now, and the spring work was beginning. Matthew, however, was helping out the work crews clearing the space for the new garden, and he was at that very moment taking a rest on his shovel, sweat beading along his forehead. Once Matthew noticed his presence, Will held up the bottle, then threw it to him on Matthew's nod.

“Thanks, Will,” he said, his breath still heaving slightly. “You really know how to take care of a guy, don't you?”

Will steadfastly ignored the curious looks he was getting from the other workers, instead preferring to watch as Matthew took the cap off the bottle and chugged back half the water in one go. He pulled a face as he swallowed, and Will felt a thrill run through him.

“You know, the problem with working with all these plants all day is eventually everything starts to taste like them, too.”

Will just smiled.

“You should drink up,” he encouraged, gesturing to Matthew. “You've worked up quite a sweat there.”

Matthew dug his shovel into the dirt so it stood by itself and stepped closer to Will, hunger clear on his face.

“There are plenty of ways I can think of to work up a sweat, if you're happy to keep me hydrated,” he said and lifted the bottle to his lips again, draining the remaining water.

“I'd be happy to,” Will answered, taking the now empty bottle from Matthew. “Let me get rid of this for you. I'd like to come back and watch what you're doing, if you don't mind.”

Matthew's eyes ran up and down Will's body as he contemplated the request. He finally straightened back up, that familiar smirk gracing his features once more.

“You can watch me any time you want, Will.” He gave Will's body one last rake with his eyes, then moved off to take up his shovel again. Will turned as he did so, taking the bottle back to the lunch room to wash out in the sink. He decided against throwing the bottle in the bin here, as a precaution. He chose, instead, to walk quickly out of the gardens and down the street a little, dropping the bottle in a dumpster behind a store. That taken care of, he returned to the gardens, to find the effects of the digitalis already beginning to take effect on Matthew.

He was standing in much the same place as he'd left him, alternately squinting and blinking rapidly, one hand coming up to rub at his eyes.

“Hey Matthew,” he said, pushing as much concern into his voice as he could. “Are you okay?”

He reached a hand up, very deliberately resting it on Matthew's shoulder.

“You don't look well. Maybe you should take the rest of the day off?”

He lifted his other hand to Matthew's neck, resting his fingers over his pulse point. His heart was racing, as Will expected. He suppressed the smile that was trying to force its way out, trying to go for a worried look instead.

“Come on,” he said, using his grip on Matthew to turn him around. “Let me take you home. You can rest up over the weekend, and be back here on Monday.”

Matthew merely nodded, following Will as he led him to his car.

“I'll just go let the others know that I'm taking you home, okay? Don't move.”

Will grinned as he strolled along. It was almost too easy. He quickly found one of his volunteers and asked her to let everyone know where he was and what he was doing, telling her he'd be back in half an hour. That job done, he went back to the car to find Matthew leaning against the door, his face turning an alarming shade of green.

“Hey,” he said, climbing into his seat. “I'll open the window. Don't throw up in my car, okay?”

Matthew groaned, but didn't seem particularly interested in arguing. He just leaned on his arm once the window was open, letting the wind blow in his face as Will drove. He was still

well enough to give Will directions, so it didn't take long until they were pulling up outside the house.

Will climbed out of the car, circling around to help Matthew out. The drive in the fresh air seemed to have helped to clear his head, though a surreptitious graze of his fingers over his wrist told Will that Matthew's heart was still racing.

“Give me your keys,” Will ordered, waiting while Matthew dug them out of his pocket. They walked up the path together, Matthew leaning on Will far more than was necessary. It didn't take long for Will to get them both inside, Matthew insisting that Will help him into his bed. Will resisted the urge to roll his eyes, instead helping Matthew as efficiently as he could, with as little physical contact as he could get away with.

“Don't be shy,” Matthew said, once he was comfortably lying down. “You can stay for a while, can't you?”

The combination of Matthew's attempted look of seduction, mixed with his decidedly ill-looking face almost had Will laughing, but he managed to restrain himself. He shook his head, plastering his concerned and worried face on as convincingly as he could.

“You're sick, Matthew," Will muttered, meaning it in every sense. "It's probably food poisoning. You should take it easy, and I'll head back to work and cover for you. Take the weekend, come back to us all healthy on Monday.”

Matthew gave another look that could only be described as lecherous, and yet it still came as a shock when his hands darted up and tangled in Will's shirt, pulling him down to his face.

“You're going to give me a kiss goodbye first though,” he growled. Will froze for a moment, blinking rapidly as he ran through his options. He settled for leaning forward, planting a fast kiss on Matthew's forehead. It seemed enough to please him for now, and he released Will, lying back down as he did so.

Will straightened back up, fiercely pushing down the urge to spit.

“Goodbye, Matthew.”

“I'll see you later, Will.”

Will nodded and left the room, making his way back to the car as quickly as possible. He couldn't even wait until he was out of sight to start scrubbing at his lips, his hand rising of its own accord the moment he left the bedroom to try to wipe away the feel of Matthew's skin beneath his own.

But it was worth it; the plan was well and truly underway.

Chapter End Notes

So we're reaching the climax of this story! Only a couple of chapters to go.

Though, I've already got the beginning of a sequel sketched out, if anyone would be interested in that.

Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Will tries to separate Bev from his plans, and Hannibal takes care of Will.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As soon as Will got back to the gardens, he went straight to the little room in the what they referred to as the storage shed that served as Matthew's work space and office. The 'storage shed', in reality a small warehouse full of everything they could possibly need to do their jobs, was currently unoccupied, with Matthew's entire staff busy getting things ready for next week. He ruffled through Matthew's desk, opening drawers and depositing small bags inside them. He was just opening the last drawer when Beverly walked in, obviously looking for him.

“Hey Will, thought I saw you coming in here. What are you doing?”

Beverly, much to Will's relief, was just curious rather than suspicious.

“I had to take Matthew home,” he said, straightening up while surreptitiously dropping the last bag.

“Yeah, I heard. What's going on?”

“I think he's got food poisoning,” Will answered, then saw an opportunity. “I was coming in here to find his list of things that will need doing before the tree arrives on Tuesday, see if I could help.”

He deliberately trailed off, looking as uncertain as he could. Bev took the bait.

“What's wrong?” she asked. “Did he try something?”

“No, no, nothing like that. We had a talk, and I think we're on the same page now,” he answered. “But I did just find this.”

He reached back down and held up the bag he had just put in the drawer, showing it to Beverly. She walked towards him, looking more closely at the bag.

“Did he actually bring drugs in here?” she asked, incredulously.

“Not just that,” Will said. “This is datura. Looks like he's trying it out.”

“What the fuck?” Bev breathed, reaching out for the bag. Will let her take it.

“You're right,” she said after a longer inspection. “We need to tell someone about this.”

“No, let's just get rid of it,” Will answered. “But I think it would be a good idea for you to stay away from him, Bev. I'll keep a close eye on him when he comes back, but just in case...”

“I'm not the one he has a fixation on, Will. What if he got this for you? It'd be easy enough for him to say you were accidentally exposed to it while you're working.”

A chill shot down Will's spine at the ease with which Beverly had effectively laid out his plan, without even being aware of it. He was suddenly crushed with enormous guilt over pulling her into this, into what he and Hannibal had decided to do.

“I know what I'm looking for, Bev. I'll be fine.”

He didn't have to manufacture the shakiness of his voice, even if it was for entirely different reasons to the ones Bev suspected. He hurriedly shut the drawer, taking the bag with him while leaving the others he had already planted where they were.

“C'mon,” he said. “Let's get out of here. We'll worry about it later.”

Beverly looked at him dubiously, but followed him out. Will couldn't get rid of the little voice inside his head that told him what a shitty friend he was being to her.

~*~*~

He left Bev in her office, having agreed to both be careful, and stay away from Matthew unless there were other people around, then locked himself in his office. He pulled out his phone, and texted Hannibal. Just the simple motion of typing out the words helped him to regain his balance. He let him know that it had all gone to plan, but elected to leave out the part about the kiss, and the bruises. He'd become aware of them soon enough.

A short time later the answering text arrived, Hannibal offering to make sure Will's dogs were fed and watered if Will would like to go straight to Hannibal's place after work. Will eagerly agreed, then leaned back in his chair, running his hands over his face.

It occurred to him that he had no idea what he was doing, and somehow that thrilled him even more.

“I am seriously, *seriously* fucked up,” he said out loud, amused at hearing his own voice when he was entirely alone. He did have regrets for getting Beverly involved, no matter how peripherally, but he was sure he'd be able to do this so she wouldn't be hurt.

Not just sure; he *knew* she would be fine. His main concern was whether or not she would suspect him. But if there was one thing he had learned in his life, it was people's ability to overlook the obvious when it came to their loved ones. He stretched one more time in his seat, smiling as he did so, and got back to his work.

The afternoon flew by, and before he knew it he was walking up Hannibal's path and through the front door. He smiled at the sounds of Hannibal working away in the kitchen, a sound that he now associated with *home*. It wasn't this house, it wasn't even his own house. It was wherever Hannibal was.

He strolled into the kitchen, not even stopping to savour the smells. Hannibal looked up, and the way his face lit up made Will falter. They both stared at each other, neither man saying a word. Finally Will moved again, silently moving behind Hannibal as he continued chopping the vegetables for dinner, and wrapped his arms around his waist, Will's chest pressing against Hannibal's back. Will sighed, pressing his face to the broad space between Hannibal's shoulders, the other man dropping his knife and leaning back into the embrace. His hands lifted to clasp Will's, causing Will to gasp when he touched the bruised wrist.

Will could only squirm as Hannibal pulled his sleeve back, inspecting the damage. He turned very slowly, Will very aware of the new tenseness in Hannibal's body, until they were facing each other.

“What happened, Will?” he asked quietly, concern and anger and just a little bit of fear on his face. Will knew that Hannibal knew exactly what had caused the marks, but was doing Will the courtesy of asking.

“Turns out Matthew is a bit more territorial than we'd thought,” he said with a mirthless laugh. “Said he likes to mark his things.”

The anger in Hannibal flared for a moment, and Will was thankful that it had never been – would never be, he knew that somehow – directed at him. He slowly lifted Will's arm, fixing his lips over one of the bruises and sucking, gently at first, and then with more pressure. It shocked Will, and it hurt, but oh *god* was it good. They held each other's gaze until Hannibal finally released Will's arm from his mouth, his teeth scraping over the newly formed mark.

“You are not his,” he growled quietly, and Will could only nod, light-headed and drowning in his need for Hannibal.

“I had to kiss his forehead, too,” he said dreamily, unable to resist. “I can't get the filthy feel of him off my lips.”

Hannibal said nothing, but pulled Will into him and sucked Will's bottom lip into his mouth in a fierce, claiming kiss. Teeth pressed gently against the delicate skin, and his tongue swiped across with ever harder pressure, before he released it only to perform the same motions on Will's top lip. Will could only groan in pleasure, his hips pushing his pronounced arousal forward against Hannibal's own growing erection. His arms snaked up around Hannibal's neck as he kissed him back before Hannibal tilted his head and began pressing small, biting kisses to Will's neck.

Hannibal's own hands were gripping tightly onto Will's hips, his fingers digging in, and the feeling was so profoundly different to the way it had been when Matthew was doing it. With Matthew it had been about possession of an object, while with Hannibal the possession was no less strong, but it was powered by a profound *love.* Will could hardly take it.

“I will erase every attempted claim he has made on you,” Hannibal whispered hoarsely into Will's ear, and Will could only nod frantically in agreement. Without warning Hannibal scooped Will up, his hands cupped beneath Will's ass as he wrapped his legs around Hannibal's waist. He could feel the strong muscles of Hannibal's upper body rippling as he moved almost effortlessly, carrying him up the stairs and into the bedroom, only letting him go once they were next to the bed. Will had latched his mouth to the side of Hannibal's neck as he had carried him, his tongue sweeping and tasting the flavours in between bites to the skin.

Hannibal tipped him back onto the bed, Will bouncing slightly with the force of the drop, and Hannibal crawled up over him, his eyes dark and heated and *wanting.* A shiver of anticipation ran through Will, chilling and exciting him. Hannibal ducked down, tearing Will's shirt open and sucking hard on one exposed nipple, Will crying out as the blend of pleasure and pain threatened to overwhelm him. His hands tangled in Hannibal's hair, alternately pulling him closer and pushing him away, completely unable to decide what it was that he truly wanted.

He lay back, allowing Hannibal to control things, and the release of his own control left him panting and wanting. It was not something he had ever thought he would enjoy, and yet when it was Hannibal, it seemed there was nothing he didn't like. He lifted his hips as Hannibal began tugging on his pants, helping ease the process, then lay back and watched as Hannibal removed his own clothes. It seemed that he could hardly wait for them to both be naked, and he scowled at Will when the younger man made no move to remove the tattered remains of his shirt.

“Tonight I am your doll, and you may bend me however you wish.”

Hannibal's nostrils flared at Will's statement, his already prominent erection giving an obvious throb. Will's answered in kind, and his limbs wrapped around Hannibal as he lunged forward, claiming Will's mouth once more. Their cocks rubbed together, the friction burning but oh so good, and Will let out a whine when Hannibal lifted back up, his lust-blown eyes staring down at Will.

“I have restraints,” he said simply, his voice hoarse and strained. Will's pulse quickened, his mind immediately throwing forward the image of himself, naked and bound, his arms and legs tied tightly to the four corners of the bed while Hannibal did whatever he wanted with his body. He could barely pant out an answer.

“Now,” was all he could manage, but the word was more than enough to have Hannibal turning and opening a draw. He turned back with a black bag which he upended, the contents spilling out next to Will. There were wide padded leather cuffs, attached to thick tethers, and Will let out an inadvertent moan when he saw them. He closed his eyes and licked his lips, then opened them again to see Hannibal watching him in wonder.

“My beautiful boy,” he said softly, reaching up to brush his fingertips along Will's face. “You will never cease to surprise me.”

The touch, as light as it was, almost melted Will. The shiver came back, more noticeable now, and he felt himself blushing when Hannibal smiled at him.

After that it was the work of a minute to have Will out of the torn shirt and the cuffs firmly fastened to his wrists and ankles.

“How do they feel?” Hannibal asked, as mindful of Will's comfort as ever. Will flexed his hands and feet, rotating them as best he could.

“Good,” he replied, and they did feel good. Tight, but not so tight they were at risk of doing damage. Just tight enough to feel safe. Hannibal pulled the tethers then, stretching them back and attaching them to something under the bed.

“Hooks,” he said at Will's questioning look. “I thought it would be nice to be prepared.”

Will could only agree.

“And your wrist?” Hannibal asked, leaning over to look concernedly at the wrist Matthew had left his mark on. “I don't want you to hurt.”

“I do,” Will growled. “I want it to hurt. Every time I look at the bruises, or feel the pain, I want to think of you, not him.”

Hannibal let out a breath, clearly affected by Will's words, but still he hesitated. Irritation, such a rare feeling when it came to Hannibal, flared in Will even as his love for the man still so worried for him surged.

“I'm fine, Hannibal,” he snapped out. “Just get back here and *fuck* me.”

If the flash in his eyes was anything to go by, being ordered seemed to suit Hannibal, and he ducked his head to ravage Will's mouth once more. Will groaned at the feel of their overheated skin sliding together, and groaned again in divine frustration when the tethers attached to his ankles prevented him from wrapping his legs around Hannibal's waist. He arched his back instead, twisting and writhing like a cat, trying to chase just a little more pressure.

Hannibal sat up, his fingers digging tightly into Will's hips and pushing down, holding him still. Will had never experienced this before, had never been one to give over like this, and the feeling of being entirely at Hannibal's mercy was almost, but not quite, too much for him to handle. He was harder than he thought he had ever been, his cock leaking pre-cum freely now, and Hannibal had barely even touched him.

It seemed to be having the same effect on Hannibal, his chest rising and falling quickly as he panted, his gaze travelling up and down Will's body. He licked his lips slowly when he focused on Will's displayed cock, a subconscious movement, Will emitting another high pitched whine when he saw it. Slowly, far too slowly for Will's liking, Hannibal lowered himself, his nose nuzzling into Will's pubic hair while his tongue flicked out and gently traced over Will's balls.

Will's hips jerked upwards at the touch, and Hannibal tightened his grip even further as he forced them back down again. Will had no doubt he would be left with a new set of bruises,

and *god* did he want more of them. As long as they were coming from Hannibal, like this, Will wanted as many as he was willing to give.

Hannibal himself was torn between taking Will right then and there, and dragging things out for hours, Will could see it. Each quick breath sent a puff of air over Will, his cock growing almost painful in its hardness, but it was when Hannibal ducked further down, without any sort of warning, and pressed the flat of his tongue firmly across his hole that Will finally lost his mind. He let out a series of incoherent, babbling moans, begging, begging, *begging* Hannibal to do more of that, more of anything, just *touch* him again.

His arms were shaking from how tightly he was pulling on the tethers, his legs only held still by the press of Hannibal's arms as he lowered his head again and began sucking at the soft, puckered skin, softly at first, then with increasing pressure. He almost cried when Hannibal pulled away.

“We might have to think about gagging you,” Hannibal said huskily, “lest the neighbours grow afraid and we find ourselves invaded by the police coming to prevent dark happenings.”

“Get your mouth back on me *now,*” Will snapped, delirious with need. He glared down at Hannibal only to find him darkly amused, his lips shiny with spit, and they held that gaze as Hannibal returned to his work. Will couldn't look away, Hannibal's head bobbing, his nose nudging at his balls as he licked and sucked, making the most *obscene* noises Will had ever heard. He slammed his head back onto the pillow, closing his eyes at last and just concentrating on the feel of Hannibal's mouth, the sounds he was making.

So focussed on that was he, that he was scarcely aware of one of Hannibal's hands releasing its tight grip on his hip. Not until, at least, those long, strong fingers were suddenly wrapped around Will's length, not moving, just holding but *oh god* it was electric. His other hand moved then, and in contrast to the tight, almost painful grip the other hand had on his cock, this one began caressing his balls, so softly, so gently and he just couldn't take it anymore.

“Hannibal, if you don't get your dick in me *right now* I'm going to end up coming all over your face. And I won't be sorry, either,” he ground out, tensing all his muscles in a bid to stave off the threatened orgasm.

Hannibal stopped his ministrations only long enough to purr against Will's skin, “You say that like I would find that upsetting,” before settling his face back between Will's legs, and his cock gave another jerk as Hannibal's voice took him that little bit closer to the edge.

“Please, Hannibal,” he gasped, finally broken. “Please, I want you inside me, please,” he begged, trailing off into a litany of broken pleading. Hannibal remained where he was, his tongue now sliding with no resistance in and out of Will's hole, but when Will let out a choked sob he finally moved, licking a trail up Will's cock as he did, lapping up the sticky pool of pre-cum that had gathered on Will's stomach.

Will craned his neck, searching for Hannibal's lips, and he almost cried when Hannibal relented and kissed him deeply. Will could taste himself on Hannibal's tongue, the mix of their two tastes intoxicating. Hannibal reached over to the drawer, fumbling for the bottle of lube, unwilling to release Will just yet. Bottle safely in hand, he returned his full attention to

Will, manoeuvring his hips until his bare cock pushed down under Will's own, slipping into the wet mess of saliva left between Will's cheeks.

“Now, Hannibal, now,” Will panted, his body twitching and thrusting to try and capture Hannibal's cock. Hannibal finally broke away, leaning back over to the drawer to pull out a condom.

“No,” Will whispered. “I want to feel you coming inside me.”

Hannibal paused for only a moment, before nodding and moving back down. He loosened the tethers, just enough to allow himself to pull Will's legs up over his hips. Will bit his lips, watching as Hannibal coated his fingers with lube and slid two of them into his already loosened hole.

“You're so open for me, my wonderful boy,” Hannibal breathed in wonder, pumping his fingers in and out a few times before adding a third. It slid in almost as easily, the stretch comfortable but not burning, and Will couldn't resist asking for more.

“Another one, please, Hannibal.”

There was only the minutest of twitches on Hannibal's face to give away him away, but it was enough for Will. He relaxed himself as much as he could, squeezing his eyes shut as Hannibal tapered his fingers and slowly eased all four of them inside, his thumb resting on his perineum. Slowly he began to pump his fingers in and out, Will's body pushing against them to meet every shallow thrust. His mind began to drift, floating away on a level of pleasure he had never felt before, and knowing there was more to come made it that much better.

Hannibal's thumb began massaging his perineum, pressing in just the right spot, over his prostate. He paused once or twice to pour more lube over his fingers, keeping the glide as slick as possible, and it was almost by accident that his thumb slipped down. Hannibal froze for a moment, until Will nodded and pushed gently against his hand. Hannibal looked undone, but took a deep breath and complied, all five fingers narrowed together and then easing slowly in, up to the knuckle.

“Will,” he breathed, the sheer wonder on his face filling Will with more joy than he thought he had ever known. He was so profoundly relaxed, more turned on that he had ever been and so full of trust. He knew he could take it, because he knew Hannibal would never, not in a million years, hurt him.

“Fuck,” Will said, willing his body to relax that final step. “I can take it, just a little bit more.”

Hannibal pushed just a little bit harder, and it was like Will's body opened up for him, his whole hand sliding inside and the fullness was indescribable. The tiniest movements that Hannibal made were amplified inside Will, sensation sparking all over and throughout him. He looked down at Hannibal, the man's face wild-eyed and disbelieving, showing such a total loss of control that Will hadn't even thought Hannibal was capable of. And yet, even with his

own emotional breach, he still remained gentle and attentive, focussed entirely on Will's comfort and pleasure.

“If only you could see this,” he murmured, face still full of wonder.

“Maybe next time you can – *ahh* - bring your camera in,” Will panted, barely able to speak. He could feel the shudder that ran through Hannibal, could feel every tiny little movement as though he were being caressed by the light itself. His hand moved against his prostate, the sensation so much more intense than anything he had ever felt before and suddenly he was coming, a full body orgasm tearing through him, his cock pulsing and sending thick spurts of come all over him, completely untouched.

He could feel Hannibal slowly easing his way out, far slower than he had entered him, and for that he was grateful. The usual overstimulation after coming was so much more powerful, and despite the care that Hannibal was taking he still winced, breathless and sated.

And yet, despite that, he still wanted to feel the rest of Hannibal in him, wanted to be taken and filled in a whole different way, and he lifted his head in the hopes of another of those devouring kisses to help bring him down. Hannibal obliged, lowering Will's legs then moving up for a kiss before getting up to retrieve a cloth to wipe his hand. He was gone only a moment, but Will felt bereft without his presence. The kiss, the roaming hands, the overwhelming love and worship that covered him when Hannibal returned made everything, *everything* worth it.

“Fuck me, Hannibal,” he demanded when they finally broke apart. “You promised me, now *fuck me.*”

“I'm not sure that's -”

“If you tell me you don't think it's a good idea then so help me Hannibal, I will never fuck you again.”

Hannibal still looked dubious, and mildly concerned, and Will's face softened.

“I know what I can take, and I will tell you if it's too much, okay?” he said gently, leaning up as far as the tethers would allow him to and placing a soft kiss on Hannibal's forehead. That seemed to be enough, and Hannibal moved back down between his legs once again, squeezing out another small handful of lube and thoroughly coating his cock with it. He lined up against Will's entrance, still soft and open, and gave Will one more look, one more chance to change his mind. Will pushed down, feeling the head of Hannibal's cock breach the muscle without any bother. Hannibal's eyes closed, his breath hissing out, but with Will's encouragement he grabbed Will's legs, hooking them back over his hips, pushing in as he did so until he finally, *finally* bottomed out. Will hadn't thought he'd be able to feel that fullness so soon after having Hannibal's hand in there, but he was so wonderfully, beautifully wrong.

He gave his body another shove down, encouraging Hannibal to move, and move he did, wasting no time in taking what he needed, slamming into Will over and over. Every thrust produced an ever expanding array of sounds from the two of them, and it didn't take long before Hannibal dropped Will's legs, leaning over Will to kiss his neck. There was just

enough slack in the tethers for Will to be able to lift his knees, angling his hips up to make sure Hannibal stayed snugly inside his slick hole.

As Hannibal pounded into Will, the overstimulation passed, and he could feel those tendrils of warmth beginning to pool in his belly again. The mess of come, still spattered across his chest and stomach, cooled and sticky as it was reduced the friction caused by Hannibal's body writhing on top of his. Hannibal's hand slowly made its way up Will's body, caressing his jaw, then moving down to lie, feather-light, over his throat.

Will hadn't thought it possible for his cock to be ready so quickly, but that movement produced another jerk from it, and he bared his throat further, encouraging Hannibal to tighten his grip. Eyes meeting, Hannibal slowly, painfully slowly, followed Will's unspoken instruction, his fingers curling around Will's throat. The pressure was still light, not enough to truly choke Will, but when he leaned up into Hannibal's hand and let out a choked gasp, Hannibal's fingers tightened fractionally more. He locked up, and Will could feel the warmth flooding him as Hannibal came. The feral wildness in Hannibal's eyes, the rubbing of his trapped cock between their bodies, the feeling of having his life in Hannibal's hands, they all combined to send Will over the edge for the second time that night. Hannibal collapsed on top of him, his hips moving back and forth almost of their own accord. Will could feel the come leaking out of him, his muscles too slack around Hannibal's softening cock to be able to hold it in. It should be embarrassing, he thought.

It wasn't.

Eventually Hannibal pulled out, Will wincing as he did so. They lay next to each other, entirely breathless, waiting for some amount of energy to return before they could speak. Hannibal rolled over, nuzzling into Will's hair, one legged hooked over Will's waist. It didn't appear to Will that Hannibal, fussy Hannibal who always kept everything immaculate, cared at all about the mess of semen and lube that coated them both. He couldn't say he blamed him.

“Had I known,” remarked Will once he had his breath back, “that this would have been the eventual result of bringing a pair of staghorn ferns over here, I would have found a way to do it much earlier.”

Hannibal just laughed, a soft breath of a sound.

“I am inclined to agree,” he responded.

They lay quietly then, Hannibal alternating his nuzzling with soft kisses skin behind Will's ear.

“Not that I'm complaining, but do you think you could untie me?” Will asked eventually, his rapidly cooling body now beginning to feel the effects of prolonged restraint. Hannibal stretched next to him, as graceful as a cat, then sat up, unbuckling the cuffs without a word. Once done, he pulled Will up in front of him, his legs either side, Will's back to his chest. Slowly and gently he began rubbing Will's joints, starting with his shoulders and working his way down. He examined his wrists, noting the redness caused by Will pulling at them so

fiercely, but assuring himself that there was no real damage done. Inspection completed, he slid himself out from behind Will, holding a hand out.

Will took it, following Hannibal into the bathroom where Hannibal ran a shower, hot and long.

All traces of Matthew had finally been washed away, replaced instead by Hannibal.

Chapter End Notes

yeah, this was way pornier than I had initially intended, BUT HEY.

Also, I wanna say a HUGE thank you to Leo who drew this awesome bit of art! It's the sketch Hannibal made of Will, and I'm so over the moon that you decided to draw something inspired by this fic. I honestly can't even tell you how happy I am ♥♥

Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

The calm before the storm.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The morning was spent lazily, Hannibal doting on Will in every conceivable fashion. He refused to allow Will out of bed, heading downstairs himself to cook what turned out to be an enormous breakfast – sausages, bacon, eggs, fresh croissants that Will could only assume Hannibal had magicked into existence from nothing. They ate quietly, side by side in the bed, Hannibal occasionally reaching across to feed Will small bites from his own plate.

By the time Hannibal allowed Will to get up – nearer to lunchtime than Will had realised – he realised why Hannibal had kept him so still. To say he was sore was an understatement, but oh *god* was it a beautiful pain. He winced with the first few steps, but as he walked through the initial burst of pain it brought with it a flood of remembered pleasure. His face heated as he walked, acutely aware of the way Hannibal was watching, half clinically and half with a look of undisguised lust. It was probably his markedly different gait this morning, he mused, noticing the way he couldn't quite bring himself to keep his stance from widening much further than it normally would be.

“How are you feeling?” Hannibal asked, his voice tightly controlled, though Will could still hear the huskiness beneath it. “There isn't too much pain, I hope.”

“Nothing that I'm not enjoying,” Will answered, deliberately making his tone as kittenishly seductive as he could. He turned in time to see the slight widening of Hannibal's eyes that was the only indication of what Will's words did to him. He smirked, the answering growl from Hannibal sending the most delicious chill running down his spine.

They both knew that now was not the time though, not even with the way Will's cock more than just twitched in interest. Instead, Hannibal got up and ran the bath. The smells coming from the concoction of liquids he poured in was heavenly, soothing and relaxing Will even before he got in. Once filled, he watched as Hannibal stripped out of his pyjamas and climbed in, holding out a hand to Will. He took it, settling himself between Hannibal's legs in the hot water, allowing Hannibal to push him forward, just slightly. Those broad hands of his began working their way up and down Will's back, strong fingers digging in to remove the last few knots he had. Will couldn't help the groan that escaped him as Hannibal massaged his muscles into complete relaxation.

Eventually he finished, leaning back and pulling Will with him until they were nestled together. His fingers didn't stop their wandering, still roaming across Will's skin; up his arms, down his chest, across his belly. Will's eyes drifted shut as he was carried away on a cloud of bliss, aware of nothing but the warmth of the bath and Hannibal's skin.

He was gradually pulled back to reality when Hannibal began nuzzling behind Will's ear, tiny kisses pressed against the skin punctuated by a subtle inhaling.

“Are you smelling me?” Will asked happily, eyes still closed and a soft smile curving his lips. His hands caressed Hannibal's legs, enjoying the feel of the corded muscle beneath his skin. Hannibal let out a small laugh, the tiny puff of air cold against Will's wet skin, goosebumps raising all over his body.

“You are intoxicating,” was all Hannibal said in response. He wrapped his arms around Will's chest, holding him tightly, and Will raised his own arms across Hannibal's. Will wondered if it was possible to freeze time, to keep them in this exact moment for the rest of eternity. He thought he could be happy, if this was all he was ever allowed to know again. His head tipped back, resting on Hannibal's shoulder, and they stayed like that then, soaking in each other's company.

“The Titan Arum is getting ready to bloom,” Will said after some minutes of silence. He wasn't entirely sure why that thought popped into his head, or why it had then made its way out of his mouth. “Bev thinks it might even open this week.”

Hannibal kissed the side of Will's neck before murmuring into his skin, “Then we shall see which blooms first; Ms Katz' flower, or ours.”

Will shivered in delight, and turned his head to expose more of his neck to Hannibal's teeth.

~*~*~

The weekend passed quickly; more quickly than Will would have liked. The two of them travelled back out to Will's house each day to feed and exercise the dogs, staying for a couple of hours each time. Saturday they took a picnic with them, Hannibal making sure their basket was filled with far more food than the two of them could reasonably be expected to consume. Sunday they spent most of their time on Will's bed, lazily rutting against one another, hands roaming under clothes and across bare skin. For all that Will had tried to argue with him, Hannibal felt that Will needed a few more days before he could partake in anything more strenuous. It was nice, being cared for so completely like that.

Sunday night saw them both in Hannibal's kitchen, the older man teaching the younger how to work on his knife skills. Will could gut a fish in his sleep, but the finer points of dicing vegetables to Hannibal's satisfaction still eluded him. Not that Hannibal was ever anything less than amused by Will's first attempts – there was just something about pleasing him that Will found exceedingly appealing.

Despite his attention to what Will was doing though, Hannibal still seemed somewhat distracted. It left Will with an uneasy feeling.

“Are you okay?” he asked after half an hour of debating with himself. It wasn't that he was worried, as such, it was just that he had never really seen Hannibal give him anything other than his complete attention. If there was something bothering him, he wanted to help in any way that he could.

Hannibal stopped chopping when Will spoke, then carefully put his knife down.

“I've been giving thought,” he said slowly, “to returning to my practice once this is done with.”

Will's eyebrows raised. Of all the things he had thought to hear from Hannibal, that wasn't it. Though, if he thought about it, it wasn't all *that* surprising. Someone like Hannibal couldn't spend forever without anything to do. And it wasn't like Will was able to keep him occupied, as much as he would like to.

“Really?” was what he said and *wow*, where did that bitter tone to his voice come from? He rubbed his eyes and tried again. “Sorry, that didn't come out how I meant it. If it's something you think you're ready for, I think you should.” That was better.

Hannibal looked dubiously at him.

“I had also given thought to maybe travelling. It has been too long since I've seen Florence.”

That sentence, on the other hand, did cause alarm. Will tilted his head, looking at Hannibal in mild confusion. Did he mean he wanted to go alone? Or did he mean he wanted Will to go with him?

“Have you seen Florence, Will?”

Will shook his head. Hannibal had talked about Florence a lot. It wasn't where he was from, but it certainly seemed to have played a big role in helping him become the man he was, and Will would be lying if he said a part of him hadn't begun yearning to see where Hannibal the boy had become Hannibal the man.

“No, I've never left the States,” he said, hopeful that he knew where this was going.

“I would like to show it to you, if that is something you would be interested in.”

Hannibal looked away from Will then, focussing entirely on the knife that he picked back up. Will just gazed at Hannibal in wonder, feeling his face soften with the love that he knew Hannibal would be able to see if he looked up.

“I'd love to,” he whispered, not moving at all. Hannibal did look up then, his mouth curving into a small smile. They said nothing after that, finishing off their preparations with no words but an entire language of soft touches.

~*~*~

The two of them curled up on the sofa after dinner, Will resting his head against Hannibal chest, his arms wrapped around that tight, tapered waist. There was very little he liked more

than feeling the warmth suffusing through Hannibal's shirt and into his body. He was almost beginning to drift off to sleep when his phone buzzed, the sound of the vibration enhanced by the wood of the coffee table it was sitting on. He sat up, slightly irked at having to move from his warm and comfortable position. Hannibal just smiled, readjusting both himself and the book he was reading. The hand that had been draped over Will's shoulder instead trailed down his back, as though loathe to break contact with him.

Will picked up the phone, expecting to see a text message from Beverly and frowning when he didn't recognise the number. He opened the message, frowning even more when he saw who it was from.

“Darling?”

Will had to try hard to suppress his giggle at the unexpected and never before voiced endearment, not because it was particularly funny, but because it made him feel giddier than he ever had in his life. Even the message on his phone, from Matthew because *of course* it was from Matthew, couldn't impinge on it.

He only realised he was grinning inanely at Hannibal when he smiled indulgently back at him, closing his book as he did so. He leaned forward and plucked the phone from Will's hand, Will still too dizzy with affection to protest much. He watched as the smile slid from Hannibal's face, replaced by a look of consternation.

“My dear Will,” he read out loud, and if Will didn't know better he would have sworn that Hannibal was imitating Matthew's lazy drawl. “Thanks for looking after me. I have something to repay you with at work tomorrow. Matthew.”

He raised his eyebrow in amusement, looking Will squarely in the eye.

“My, my, what could you possibly have done to warrant a gift in thanks for your ministrations, dear Will?” he teased, trying and failing to hide his smile. Will just slapped at his leg. His phone buzzed again as he did, and this time Hannibal's eyebrows nearly shot off his face.

“What?” Will demanded, grabbing the phone back off Hannibal. There was a photo attached, and his jaw dropped in disgust.

“I believe *that* is what they refer to as a 'dick pic',” Hannibal said dryly, watching Will's reaction.

“I guess you could call it that,” Will said in disbelief, before a thought occurred to him. He put the phone down, then stood up and pulled Hannibal's legs until he was lying flat on the sofa. Hannibal, do his credit, didn't so much as bat an eyelid, instead curious to see where this was going. Will deftly undid Hannibal's fly, opening the pants and pulling at his underwear until his cock was freed, lying soft and beautiful against his leg. This time he did tilt his head in question, but remained silent as Will looked from his phone to Hannibal and back again, before declaring, “Your cock is superior in every measurable category, and probably all the immeasurable ones as well.”

Hannibal just smiled at that, his eyes both soft and heated.

“Wait,” Will said, yet another idea coming to him. “Let me take a photo.”

“Why?” Hannibal asked, curious but neither sounding nor looking like he was going to argue.

“For scientific reasons. You like minds, and I'm sure you wouldn't be averse to fucking with them on occasion.”

“Indeed I am not,” Hannibal answered, clearly liking where this plan was going. He stretched out displaying himself more fully, as Will snapped a close up.

“Now get it hard,” Will demanded, sliding into his role as the pushy director.

“I believe that is your job,” Hannibal purred, bringing his hands up to rest beneath his head. He looked insufferably smug as Will rolled his eyes and leaned down, licking a stripe along Hannibal's now not nearly as flaccid cock. His lips wrapped around the tip and he slid down, sucking hard until Hannibal was proud and erect, his already not insignificant length and girth enhanced by the action. Will popped off, wiping his mouth, and he took another photo. He attached them and sent them to Matthew with no accompanying message. He wondered if Matthew would notice the salt and pepper of Hannibal's pubic hair, not quite cut out of shot, or if he would be too busy salivating over what he would presume to be Will's answering self-portrait.

“You are a despicable boy,” Hannibal growled, pulling Will up for a kiss once he had put the phone down.

“And you love every second of it,” Will said between kisses, drawing a laugh from the man beneath him.

“I do,” he said softly, reaching up to stroke the hair back from Will's face. On the table the phone buzzed again, and Will turned to look at it. “What do you think,” he murmured. “Should we see what Matthew thinks of your amazing cock?”

“Why not,” Hannibal smiled, releasing Will after one more kiss. Will sat up, retrieving the phone and opening the message, reading it aloud to Hannibal.

“Fuck baby, you're so big,” he parroted, already crying with laughter. “I'm touching myself right now just looking at it.”

Even Hannibal let out a laugh at that, the two of them falling over each other in macabre delight.

“I guess we should just let him have his fun,” Will said, finally catching his breath. “It's probably the last time he'll be able to.”

“Everything is ready?” Hannibal asked, returning to stroking Will's hair. Will lay down on Hannibal, resting his head on Hannibal's chest. It was so soothing, having his hair stroked like that.

“Yeah,” he said, suddenly sleepy. “We can even get started tomorrow night, if you don't want to wait any longer.”

“I think given this escalation in behaviour,” Hannibal said, wriggling a little to pull Will more comfortably on top of him, “it would be wise to bring things forward.” He pressed another kiss to the top of Will's head. “To tomorrow night, then.”

“To tomorrow night,” Will replied, closing his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

So, I'm about 99% sure that, barring any crises of verbosity, that the next chapter will be the last. That said, as you can probably see by the series update, the planning for the sequel is well underway! ♥

Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

The Flower.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will had entirely forgotten about the photos he had sent Matthew, as caught up in planning his day's – and night's – work as he had been. That memory was rather forcibly brought back to the forefront of him mind when he took a break for morning tea, ducking into the lunch room for a cup of coffee. The room was empty when he arrived, but by the time he turned to carry his mug to the table after stirring the sugar in, Matthew had entered.

“Good morning, Will,” the man all but purred. Will felt greasy just hearing the way Matthew spoke to him, and he tried to keep his shudder from being too obvious. Apparently it worked because Matthew's eyes just scanned over him with undisguised lust, stopping once they reached his crotch. This time, Will had to fight off the urge to cross his legs. Or hold the mug in front of himself. Instead, he widened his stance a little, lifting the mug to his lips and taking a small sip of the coffee. He wasn't surprised to see Matthew clench his fists, just briefly. He peered at Matthew over his coffee, mildly amused when he finally tore his eyes away from Will's groin to find him watching.

“I had a lot of fun last night,” Matthew said, everything about him screaming lasciviousness. “I hope you did, too.”

“You have no possible idea how much fun I had, Matthew,” Will said, unable to resist twisting things a little more. It wasn't a *lie*, not really. It just didn't mean even close to what Matthew thought it did.

“You know, I gotta say. You've made the right call, ditching that pompous old asshole for someone who knows exactly what you need.”

Will's smile tightened at the insult to Hannibal, and the reminder of what exactly it was that Matthew seemed to think Will needed. He was just pleased that Hannibal had utterly changed the way he saw the fading bruises still encircling his wrist. Matthew, of course, was too wrapped up in his own sense of self-importance to notice the suddenly icy look on Will's face. Even through his cold rage, though, Will was gleefully amused, wondering what Matthew would say if Will told him it was that very same *pompous old asshole* that he had apparently had so much fun jerking off to last night.

Will took another sip of his coffee and hummed, unable to play along well enough to even pretend to agree with what Matthew said. Not that he needed overt agreement from Will – he

saw, understood, and took whatever it was that he wanted, and this was no exception.

Matthew stepped closer, trailing his fingers across the table in what Will assumed was supposed to be a seductive manner.

“So when am I going to get to see the real deal?”

“Now, now, I can't show you that now. Not when just anyone could walk in.”

Matthew strode closer, stepping well and truly into Will's personal space. His fingertips lifted from the table to feather along Will's belt, tightening on the buckle.

“That's just more of a turn on, though. Getting caught? Yeah, I like that.”

Will tensed, his own fingers tightening on the handle of his mug. He grabbed Matthews wrist with his free hand, squeezing tightly to stop it in its path.

“You got some fight in you,” Matthew remarked. He didn't look overly pleased about it. “We'll get rid of that.”

“Tonight,” Will said, forcing his voice to remain level. “Stay here tonight. We'll get the tree in this afternoon, and we can christen the grounds tonight. I'll be here, ready and waiting.”

Matthew's face shifted at that, dark delight filling his eyes.

“I look forward to it,” he said, giving Will's belt one last tug before letting go. He turned abruptly and left the room, the door slamming closed behind him. Will's shoulders slumped, the tension draining out of him all at once. This had to stop. Holding the mug in both hands, he drummed his fingers on its sides, debating with himself whether to go through with the datura part of his plan. Eventually he nodded to himself, then went to pull the sandwich Hannibal had made him from the fridge.

~*~*~

After lunch, it was remarkably easy to get into Matthew's office without him seeing. The man himself was in the midst of getting the Manchineel tree planted, a job that Will was supposed to be helping with. He'd be there soon enough, he reasoned, continuing on with his work. He carefully unwrapped the sandwich and opened it up. Part of him rebelled at the thought of giving Matthew something that Hannibal had made; the man did not deserve it, not in the least. But it was for the greater good, and he knew that Hannibal would be encouraging him to do this. He dug through Matthew's draws for one of the packets he had secreted away, smiling in triumph when one came to hand. He opened it up, pouring its contents into the sandwich – an entire pod's worth of crushed seeds covering the salad. Crushed and broken like that, and scattered throughout the salad of the sandwich, Will didn't think it would be too hard to convince Matthew that they were chia seeds, if he were to ask. Especially with a little distraction.

He shoved the empty packet into his pocket and rewrapped the sandwich. He grabbed a pen and scrap of paper, writing nothing more than a W, and leaving it on top of the food. As he

straightened back up, the door opened and Will froze, watching as Matthew walked in. His eyebrows lifted as he saw Will, obviously surprised to see him there. It didn't take long for the surprise to be wiped away though, replaced by that ever present smirk.

“Well there you are,” he said, creeping closer. “I didn't expect to find you *here*. Couldn't stay away, huh?”

“I uh,” Will fumbled, trying to sound as nervous as he could. It wasn't hard, given how boxed in he was. “I wanted to apologise for being so rude, earlier. And I brought you this.”

He picked up the sandwich, holding it out in offering. Matthew took it, eyeing it curiously as he unwrapped it.

“You make this?” he asked, smelling it.

“Yeah, completely home made,” Will replied, skirting the edges of the truth as much as possible. It was easier for someone to buy a lie when it was cloaked in truth. “Chicken salad,” he added, his tone hopeful. Again, that wasn't hard for him to do. He wanted nothing more than to watch Matthew down every last bite, then sit back and watch the carnage unfold.

And take a bite Matthew did, his eyes never leaving Will's as he did so. It was strange, Will thought, how the same behaviour from Hannibal turned him on more than damn near anything had, but from Matthew it turned nothing but his stomach. Even so, he more than maintained the eye contact as the sandwich slowly disappeared, until nothing but crumbs remained.

“I have something of yours inside of me,” Matthew murmured, “and tonight you will have something of mine inside of you.”

Will almost choked on the laugh that burst from him, and he tried hard to make sure Matthew didn't see it for what it was. Thankfully, he seemed to see it as some sort of nervous eagerness, his hand trailing over Will's stubble and making his skin crawl.

“It's okay, baby. Tonight is going to be better than anything you've ever had.” His fingers tightened in Will's hair, pulling on the strands painfully. “I'll make sure of it.”

Just as the pain caused tears to begin prickling Will's eyes Matthew let go, giving Will's cheek one last pat.

“I'll see you outside.”

Will just nodded, panting slightly, and left the office.

Jesus Christ, he thought. If this was what Matthew was willing to do with only minimal encouragement, he shuddered to think what would happen with more. Or if he didn't have protection in place.

He skittered his way back to his own office, dropping the empty bag in one of the public rubbish bins. It didn't matter if that was found. In his office he swallowed a whole bottle of

water, willing his heart to stop pounding quite so hard. Instead, it just changed its nature, from mild fear to anticipation. He pulled his phone out, texting Hannibal.

(10.58 am) I think we're going to have a good chorus of trumpets to listen to tonight.

The response was fast arriving, and Will smiled as he read it.

(11.00 am) I have always been fond of a well played trumpet. I shall look forward to it immensely.

His only job left now was to make sure Beverly was well away from all of this. Happily, he had already sorted that out.

~*~*~

“Hey, Bev?”

Bev looked up as Will entered her office.

“Hey, you!” she smiled. “I haven't seen you all day. You have a good weekend?”

“I did,” Will answered, blushing slightly as he thought about what exactly he and Hannibal had gotten up to. It didn't go unnoticed by Bev, of course, and she smiled indulgently back up at him.

“The look on your face says I don't want details, but I'm glad it was good,” she said with a sly grin.

“You're right. You don't want details,” he smirked. “But that's not why I'm here. I have a favour to ask of you. A *big* favour.”

“How big are we talking?” Bev asked, suddenly suspicious.

“It's not super big, but definitely big enough to have me buying the beers on Friday.”

Bev cocked her head, a smile spreading across her face.

“You're taking me out on Friday?”

“If you do me this favour, yeah.”

“Bullshit. You're taking me out on Friday regardless of whether I do you the favour. I'll just let you buy me the drinks if I do.”

There was only a small amount of real needling there, but it was enough to have Will feeling more than a little guilty. He and Bev used to hang out all the time, but since Hannibal...

He nodded.

“Deal. I'm taking you out Friday, wherever you want to go.”

Bev smiled again then sat up, taking a deep breath.

“Hit me then. What's this big favour you need?”

“I was supposed to be going to help out Alana, talk to her class about the gardens, but with this Manchineel tree here early I'm kinda caught up. I can't really leave it, but I can't leave Alana in the lurch, either, so...”

“So you want me to take your place? When?”

“Now?”

Will grinned hopefully at her, even going so far as to bat his eyelashes a little. She just balled up a sheet of paper and threw it at him, but by then he knew he had won. Bev was going to go and take his place, helping with Alana's students. In truth, he'd completely forgotten he'd promised Alana that he would do it until last night, talking with Hannibal. It was a long class, a late afternoon going into evening class, and there was no way she'd go anywhere other than straight home afterwards. Which meant from this point on, she was going to be away from the gardens, and away from Matthew.

And perhaps most importantly, as loath as Will was to admit it, away from him and Hannibal.

As expected, Bev nodded.

“I could do with some time away from here anyway,” she said, stretching her arms above her head. “I'm going crazy checking that corpse flower every few minutes even though I *know* it's not going to open today. Are you gonna sort it out with Alana?”

“I might have already done that,” Will said, not having to feign his sheepish tone at all. “She's expecting you any time from now to go over the prep she's done, and to have you add in anything you think she needs.”

“Well aren't you an efficient beaver,” Bev teased, even as she stood from her desk and retrieved her jacket.

“You're a lifesaver, Bev. Tell me which beers you want and I'll be around at your place straight after work on Friday.”

He was ridiculously grateful to Bev for going along with this, even though she had no idea what she was really doing. He was grateful to Alana for having no problems with Will swapping with Bev, and he was grateful to fate for giving him the most convenient means to get Bev somewhere safe that he could possibly think of. They walked out together, Will heading back out to where everyone else was working, and Bev heading in the same direction to make her way to her car.

“You know I'm going to go for the most expensive beer I can think of, right?” she asked, as teasingly as ever. Will knew she would, too.

“And you completely deserve it,” he said earnestly, causing Bev to slap his arm playfully.

“You go play nice with the new tree, okay? And stay away from Matthew unless there are at least a dozen other people around.”

Will grinned as they went their separate ways, waving in faux irritation again as Bev yelled out, “A dozen, okay? Not eleven, the full twelve!”

He was amazed at how much lighter he felt now that Bev was safely out of the way. And he was *excited.* The effects of the datura should already be well underway, given how much Matthew had eaten. He made his way over to the work area, keeping an eye out for Matthew. He frowned when he realised he couldn't see him anywhere, just the usual milling about of workers and student volunteers. He walked up to the nearest one and asked after Matthew.

“He's not feeling well again. Food poisoning flaring back up,” the student said, obviously not really caring a whole great deal. Will thanked him and looked around, wondering where Matthew would have gone. Things could get a bit thorny if he was already wandering; Will wouldn't have any idea where he would be trying to get to. The most logical place to start looking was Matthew's office, so he decided to start there. Halfway there, though, he found Matthew huddled in a corner, his arms wrapped tightly around his stomach.

“Hey, Matthew,” Will said cautiously, walking slowly towards him. Matthew looked up, his face strained. The datura was *definitely* beginning to do its work.

“Hey, Will,” he replied, his voice as strained as his face. “Seems I'm not quite over the food poisoning. Probably shouldn't have eaten that whole sandwich in one go.”

Will reached a hand out, placed it on Matthew's forehead.

“You're a bit warm,” he said, frowning in concern. “Maybe I should take you home again.”

“That'll probably explain the dry mouth.” Matthew tried to smile as he spoke, but immediately looked pained, gripping his middle even tighter. “Yeah, I think going home is the best idea.”

Will nodded, grabbing Matthew's arm and hauling him back up into more of a standing position. Matthew leaned heavily against him, and Will rolled his eyes as he helped prop Matthew up.

“That's twice you've given me something to eat or drink,” Matthew remarked, beginning to sound woozy, “and twice I've gotten sick soon afterwards.”

“Maybe the universe is trying to tell you something,” Will answered dryly. He didn't give away any indication of guilt – not that it would matter, not anymore. Matthew was going to be dead before the night was ended, and who would he tell then? He was already showing signs of struggling with his speech, and even in this state he was still trying to take advantage of things by pressing himself much closer to Will that he needed to, his fingers scrabbling ineffectually at Will's shirt hem in a bid to get underneath it. It wouldn't be difficult to distract him away from anything he might say to someone else.

“I wouldn't be so easily put off,” he panted, proving Will's point to himself.

“Of course you wouldn't,” Will huffed, a small smirk on his face. Part of him screamed that he should at the very least be feeling bad for what he was about to do to Matthew, but he wasn't. Not in the slightest. It was odd; Will had always thought himself a moral person, still did, but Matthew … Matthew was something else. Will had no doubts about whether or not he was the first person Matthew had put through this; his behaviour was too practised, too confident for this to have been his first time. And he had just as few doubts about Matthew moving on to someone else once he had damaged Will beyond repair.

If nothing else, he was saving someone less able to cope from a much worse ordeal.

You're just justifying that to yourself, a tiny voice whispered in the back of his mind. He shrugged. So what if he was? It didn't make it any less true. And the thought of doing this with *Hannibal … that* filled him with an excitement he had never felt before. This would tie them together, irrevocably and forever. The level of possessiveness he felt *did* shock him, but when he thought about how that feeling was returned at least as much, he was easily able to shake it off. He smiled.

“Let's get you home.”

~*~*~

“Hello, Will.”

Hannibal's voice was warm, the smile twinkling in his eyes playful, more than heated. Will stood aside and let him into the house, noting the leather gloves he wore. Will's were most decidedly *not* leather – cheap, but more than adequate for the job. He did envy Hannibal the warm looking gloves though, and made a note to get himself some better ones if this was something they intended on continuing.

He inhaled as Hannibal moved past him, the man's cologne a subtly intoxicating scent that Will could never get enough of. He closed the door behind Hannibal, then turned to wrap his arms around Hannibal's waist from behind, hooking his chin up and over his shoulder. Hannibal's arms rose to rest on top of Will's, and there they stood for a moment, before Hannibal took a breath and stepped forward, releasing himself from Will's embrace.

“As much as I would love to stay like this,” he said as he moved, “we really do need to get started. Where is he?”

Will lead the way, calling back over his shoulder, “I've left him locked in the basement. Seemed the easiest way to keep the noise down and keep him where we want him.”

Hannibal nodded in approval, hoisting the bag he had brought in with him.

“And how is his condition?”

“Last I heard he was talking to his brother, and maybe a few friends. I don't know, I wasn't paying that much attention. I know I was apparently in there with him for a while.”

Will shuddered as he remembered the sounds coming out of the basement for *that* particular hallucination. He decided it was best for all concerned if he didn't share the details of what seemed to be going on for that. Hannibal merely gave him a curious look, but said nothing.

“Is everyone out of the gardens now?” Will asked. He had returned to work after locking Matthew up, carrying on as though nothing were wrong. The tree was planted and well and truly fenced off, protecting any visitors until they erected the custom designed glass house over it. Of course, it would be far too late for Matthew by that stage. He had returned to Matthew's after work, and waited for Hannibal. Hannibal himself had waited until well after nightfall to appear, in a car that Will didn't recognise. He didn't ask.

They reached the door to the basement, Will throwing it open to the sound of Matthew muttering, loudly, about his dropped cigarettes.

“Is he suggestible?” Hannibal asked, peering down the stairs in interest.

“Incredibly,” Will answered, before calling out for Matthew to come upstairs. The man himself bounded up the stairs, both Will and Hannibal immediately noticing the torn up state of his fingers.

“Matthew, what have you been doing?” Hannibal asked, his voice sounding much like Will imagined it must have with his patients. Matthew looked at him, surprised, then narrowed his eyes.

“Fucking Will, because I won and you lost,” he spat, suddenly looking feral. Hannibal didn't react beyond the twitch of an eyebrow.

“Matthew?” Will said quietly, trying to pull his attention to him without winding him up any further. “What have you been doing down there?”

It worked, Matthew's attention now solely focussed on Will, as though Hannibal weren't even there.

“I dropped my cigarettes,” he said, attempting to slink his way into Will's space. Hannibal pressed a hand to his chest, a hand that Matthew didn't seem to notice, but stopped for anyway. “They sunk into the ground so I had to dig them up before they put down roots.”

“Interesting,” murmured Hannibal.

“You're needed at work, Matthew. Remember? You're supposed to be meeting me there. Just us.”

“Oh I haven't forgotten,” Matthew growled. “I'll fuck your eye sockets while you beg me for more.”

This time it was Will's turn to hold out a hand, only this time it was Hannibal who needed stopping. His face was pulled back in a snarl, but it only took a soft touch from Will to have him backing down.

“Walk,” Will commanded Matthew. “I'll be waiting under the Manchineel tree.”

They watched as Matthew happily complied, Will calling out to him to not forget his work keys.

“I should cut his throat where he stands,” Hannibal snarled again, his fists squeezing so tightly Will could hear the leather creak.

“Soon, my love,” he soothed, running his hands up Hannibal's arms to squeeze his shoulders. “You'll be pleased to know that the hired workers were rougher than they should have been when moving the tree into the hole. There were several cuts made to the trunk – nothing that will threaten the tree, but enough superficial cuts to have sap leaking out. One got sprayed by it, had to go the the hospital for treatment.”

Hannibal growled, pulling Will into his arms.

“You are devious, and perfect, and *mine*,” he said, devouring Will in a kiss that Will knew he would never be able to forget.

“I am yours,” he replied once they separated. “And you are mine.”

~*~*~

They followed Matthew's meandering walk at a distance, hand in hand, just a couple out for a night time stroll. They had removed their gloves, and Will relished the feeling of Hannibal's strong, warm hand in his. The fact they were on their way to make sure Matthew died did nothing to take away from the relaxing, intimate nature of their walk. If anything, it only served to enhance it.

“I love you,” Will said, bumping his hip into Hannibal's.

“And I love you,” Hannibal answered, releasing Will's hand to wrap his arm around Will's shoulders. Will put his own arm around Hannibal's waist, and they remained like that, pressed as close to one another as possible, until they reached the gates of the gardens. They were standing ajar, Matthew having already gone through. With a surreptitious look around, they squeezed through the gap then pushed the gates shut. It wouldn't do to have anyone stumble through them later. As the gates closed, a raindrop fell on Will's cheek, then another. Hannibal brushed it away with a smile.

“It would appear that tonight is our night, Will. Fate has given us her blessing.”

Will smiled back, grasping the hand Hannibal had used to collect the raindrop and kissing the water away.

They separated after that, gloves being pulled back on. Will could see the change in the way Hannibal carried himself. Where he always looked charming, relaxed yet ready, he now looked every inch the predator. Even his face was shuttered, devoid of emotion.

It thrilled Will.

They moved with purpose now, walking to the Manchineel tree, one whole section of fence pulled over; it was clear that it was Matthew's work. They entered the space to find Matthew

walking around the tree, looking intently for Will.

“It's beginning to rain, Matthew,” he called out, amused at the way Matthew's head whipped around like a dog's. “You should shelter under the tree.”

“Come with me,” Matthew demanded, beginning to walk over to Will and Hannibal instead of moving further under the tree. The rain was coming down harder how, Will and Hannibal growing wetter with every second.

“No,” Will said, his voice calm and authoritative. “You go under the tree, and I will leave Hannibal here and come to you. I want to watch you first.”

Even through the delirium Matthew's eyes glittered in arrogant calculation

“I told you he needed me,” he said to Hannibal, acknowledging his presence for the first time. He moved carefully backwards, out of the rain and under the spreading leaves of the tree.

“I don't know what I would do if ever I heard your words in earnest,” Hannibal whispered, his face as hard as it had been, but a slight tremor running under his voice.

“You will *never* hear me say that for real Hannibal. You're mine, and I'm not letting you go.”

He could feel the flush of pleasure and his possessive words and smiled.

“Take your clothes off,” he yelled out to Matthew. “I want to see all of you.”

Matthew complied, his clothes removed in very short order. By now the rain was beginning to drip through the leaves and onto his body, toxins from the tree carried along in every drop. Will could see the red marks beginning to appear all over his body.

“What do you think people are going to think when they find him?” he asked conversationally.

“I imagine there will be shock,” Hannibal answered. “It's not every day you find someone accidentally killing themselves with a tree.”

They stood in silence for a moment longer, watching as Matthew displayed himself.

“You've definitely got the better cock,” Will remarked. Hannibal couldn't help but huff out a laugh at that. “Did you know he actually did jerk off to you last night?”

“I shall choose to be flattered, and leave it at that,” Hannibal said, amusement colouring his words. They were interrupted at that point by what Will thought was the oddest squealing noise he had ever heard, coming from Matthew.

“Will, the cigarettes are burning me!” he exclaimed, trying in vain to put out the little fires on his skin. Will raised an eyebrow, crossing his arms as he watched.

“Please, allow me,” Hannibal said smoothly, lifting his bag. He pulled out a knife, obviously brand new and just as obviously incredibly sharp. He tossed it to the ground before Matthew.

Still the rain fell, the two of them completely drenched. Despite the chill of the rain, Will felt flushed with heat, the anticipation of what he was about to witness building to ever greater heights.

“Cut the cigarettes off,” Hannibal told Matthew, voice returning to doctor mode once more. Matthew hurriedly picked up the knife and, to Will's eternal surprise, began doing exactly as Hannibal ordered. He dug the knife into the red, blistered patch of skin on his stomach, and began sawing. He moved to each new blister, cutting them out in huge chunks of flesh, discarding each excised piece as though it were nothing more than the used cigarette he so clearly seemed to think it was. Rivulets of blood became rampaging torrents as he cut deeper and deeper, and the oddest thing to Will was the fact that he didn't seem to be noticing at all what he was doing. And with each part he cut out, another two drops would fall to his exposed skin, necessitating another extraction. The blood poured from him, mixing with the rain to soak into the earth beneath him, and he only began screaming again in frustration at the way he couldn't reach the blisters on his back.

“Scratch them off on the bark,” Will called out, his tone friendly and helpful. He couldn't help but watch the way the dripping of sap from the wounds in the tree mirrored the dripping of blood from the wounds in the man.

Matthew complied once more, backing up and rubbing his skin over the bark of the tree, driving the sap into each fresh scratch he made. His front was a mass of cuts and gouges, flaps of skin hanging and blood flowing freely.

“He really does look like a corpse flower, doesn't he?” he observed, gazing at the way each hole in Matthew's body resembled a flower in fruit.

“It's a shame we didn't convince him to carve himself up to give us a petal formation,” Hannibal mused. Will could only agree. It would have been unbearably, unspeakably *beautiful*, to have both flowers blooming in the same way at the same time.

The pain was beginning to get to Matthew though, and his screaming began to grow louder and louder. The rain was helping to muffle the noise, but it was reaching the point where they couldn't take any further risks.

“Matthew!” Will called, drawing the man's increasingly desperate attention. “Eat the apples. They will help.”

Matthew nodded frantically and began jumping up, pulling at the branches until he had a handful of the tree's fruit. His back was torn to ribbons, the sap having worked its way under his skin, burning and blistering everywhere it hadn't been torn through. He shoved the small apple-like fruits into his mouth, chewing and swallowing as though his life depended on it.

He was so very wrong.

Without warning he collapsed to his knees, hands coming up to clutch, and then tear at his throat as his airway swelled and closed. His eyes bulged from his head as his face turned purple, and he fell back against the trunk of the tree, his mouth filling with blisters even as he

choked to death. It wasn't long until the last tremors of his death passed, and he fell limp, hands falling to his sides.

There was only the sound of rain now, Will and Hannibal both looking at the body with a sort of detached fascination.

“I should feel bad.”

“He was a pig,” Hannibal answered, “and he died like one.”

“A mouth full of apples.”

The stood in silence a moment longer, Will moving closer to wrap his arms around Hannibal. They held each other, and Will had never felt closer to someone than he did in this moment. He wondered if this feeling would turn out to be addictive.

A piece of the fruit was forced from Matthew's lax, swollen mouth, and Will was suddenly taken by the image of him roasted like a pig, a real apple in his mouth as he was displayed on a dining table. He began to giggle, and Hannibal looked down at him in amusement.

“Would you care to share?”

“I was imagining him as a pig at the table, the apple shoved in his mouth. We could carve slices off him, treat him how he deserved to be treated.”

Hannibal looked at Will thoughtfully, so many thoughts and emotions flicking through his mind and across his face that Will would be surprised if even Hannibal could keep track of them all.

“He is poisoned. Eating that meat would poison us,” he finally answered, but there was something in his tone of voice that piqued Will's curiosity, and awakened a need in him that he had never before noticed.

“Maybe next time,” he began carefully, watching Hannibal's reactions. “Maybe next time we can forgo the poison.”

Hannibal's face grew blank, then a slow smile widened, lighting him up completely.

“Then next time it is.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, here we are. I want to say thank you to all of you who have stuck with this, and given me all the motivation and encouragement that helped me actually get it finished. I

have so loved writing this, and reading each and every comment that you guys have left, and I can't say enough how much I love you all ♥♥♥

I may have taken some liberty/poetic license with the specifics, but datura and Manchineel trees really are dangerous as fuck and don't ever mess with them because they are nasty, nasty plants. They should be left to look pretty, and never be touched.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!